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REFLECTIONS FROM EFFECTIVE TEACHERS OF AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS: INVESTIGATING THE INTERSECTION OF PREPARATION, PRACTICE, AND POLICY

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REFLECTIONS FROM EFFECTIVE TEACHERS OF AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS: INVESTIGATING THE INTERSECTION OF PREPARATION, PRACTICE, AND POLICY

by

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to DaQuaysha Haynes,

my daughter and my inspiration.

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REFLECTIONS FROM EFFECTIVE TEACHERS OF AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS: INVESTIGATING THE INTERSECTION OF PREPARATION, PRACTICE, AND POLICY

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This research was a qualitative study of 10 elementary school teachers working with predominantly African American students in a large urban school district. The primary focus of this study was to analyze the perceptions of effective teachers of African American students. The hope is that the data presented in this study will initiate trends that assist in effectively preparing teachers to attain successful outcomes with African American students. Through document analysis and interviews with selected university faculty, this interpretive qualitative study also examined the multicultural education training component that targets African American students in the undergraduate elementary teacher preparation program at a highly selective public university in Texas.

The data were collected through interviews and document analysis. The themes that emerged from data collected with the 10 elementary school teachers included (a) perceptions of culture, (b) beliefs about teaching, (c) academic accountability, (d) teacher preparation, and (e) contributions to success.

This study utilized Ladson-Billings' (1995a, 2001) theoretical framework of culturally relevant pedagogy to examine teachers' perspectives. Supplemented with interviews of selected university faculty, this study also utilized document analysis of relevant teacher preparation programs and educational policies. Along with uncovering areas of further research, an examination of the various components of this study identifies recommendations for reform of educational practice, teacher preparation programs, and educational policy.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND OF STUDY

Introduction

Research indicates that the achievement gap still exists among African American students when compared to their white counterparts in public schools (Darling-Hammond & Berry, 1999; Ladson-Billings, 2001). Proponents of multicultural education hold that when teachers have little or no insight into instructing students who have cultural backgrounds that are different from their own, they can provide a disservice to these students by not successfully helping them to achieve their highest academic potential (Banks, 1994; Gay, 2003; Gollnick & Chinn, 1998; Sleeter, 1996). Minority students experience significant school failure in public schools (Reyes & Rorrer, 2001). African American students, for instance, drop out of school at higher rates than white students (National Center for Education Statistics, 2006). Indicating that the national dropout rate for Whites in 2000 remained lower than the rate for African Americans and Hispanics ages 16 to 24, NCES reported the following dropout rates: Asian/Pacific Islanders, 3.8 %; Whites, 6.9%; African Americans, 13.1%; and Hispanics, 27.8%.

Along with high school dropout rates, college access has also been a concern for African American students. According to the United States Census Bureau, the following data represent the percentage of people who attained a bachelor's degree or higher in 2004: Whites, 24.4%; African Americans, 14.4%; Asians, 43.4%; and Hispanics, 9.6%. Research regarding culturally relevant pedagogy has been beneficial in

providing what practices, attitudes, and beliefs teachers should use to contribute to the success of African American students (Ladson-Billings, 1994).

The purpose of this interpretive qualitative study (Merriam, 2002) was to analyze the perceptions of effective teachers of African American students in a large urban Texas Independent School District (ISD). Through document analysis and interviews with selected university faculty, this study examined the multicultural education training component that targets African American students in the undergraduate elementary teacher preparation program at a highly selective public university in Texas. Culturally relevant pedagogy was used as a theoretical framework through which to examine teachers' perspectives. Along with uncovering areas of further research, an examination of the various components of this study identifies recommendations for reform of educational practice, teacher preparation programs, and educational policy.

Explanations for Underachievement of African American Students

African American students are representative of students of color who have the highest dropout rate, misplacement and overrepresentation in special education, and underrepresentation in gifted and talented and advanced placement programs (Darling-Hammond, 2000). This literature indicates that public schools and institutions of higher education have failed to develop a critical, pedagogical educational environment that is effective for and relevant to the needs of African American students. Furthermore, schools have consistently failed to assist children of color in attaining successful outcomes (Freire, 1985; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Valenzuela, 1999).

Numerous studies have demonstrated that deficit thinking paradigms consistently prevail in both these institutions and perpetuate the status quo (Delpit, 1995; McKenzie & Scheurich, 2004). When Irvine (2003) discussed the weaknesses and contributions of socioeconomic, sociopathological, genetic, and cultural theories regarding the achievement gap that persists for African American students, she concluded that teachers have to be perceived as a part of the solution in closing the achievement gap instead of the problem.

Achievement Gap

School reform efforts focused on academic success for children of color have produced little success (Darling-Hammond, 2000). Data indicate that the gap between the school success of many children of color and that of their white, often middle-class, counterparts continues to persist in Texas (Texas Education Agency, 2006). For instance, with the implementation of the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS), achievement gaps have been documented (Texas Education Agency, 2006). During the 2002-2003 school year, the following percentages were reported for student groups who met the passing standard for all tests of TAKS: Whites, 73.3%; African Americans, 43.0%; Hispanics, 48.0%; Native Americans, 62.8%; and Asian/Pacific Islanders, 79.8%. Compared to white students, the most significant achievement gap data are for African American students with 29 points and for Hispanic students with 24 points.

During the 2003-2004 school year, the following percentages were reported for all tests of TAKS: Whites, 81%; African Americans, 53%; Hispanics, 58%; Native

Americans, 72%; and Asian/Pacific Islanders, 86%. Compared to white students, the most significant achievement gap data are for African American students with 28 points and for Hispanic students with 23 points.

During the 2004-2005 school year, the following percentages were reported for all tests of TAKS: Whites, 77%; African Americans, 47%; Hispanics, 53%; Native Americans, 68%; and Asian/Pacific Islanders, 83%. Compared to white students, the most significant achievement gap data are for African American students with 30 points and for Hispanic students with 24 points.

During the 2005-2006 school year, the following percentages were reported for all tests of TAKS: Whites, 81%; African Americans, 52%; Hispanics, 58%; Native Americans, 72%; and Asian/Pacific Islanders, 87%. Compared to white students, the most significant achievement gap data are for African American students with 30 points and for Hispanic students with 24 points.

No significant growth has been observed for African American students, and the same is true for Hispanic students who are no more than 6 points above African American students in the four consecutive school years.

Deficit Thinking

In response to the data regarding the achievement gap that persists for students of color, some scholars (Delpit, 1995; Scheurich, 1998; Valencia, 1991; Valenzuela, 1999) have held that the problem with student achievement lies mainly with the educational system rather than with the students, families, or neighborhoods. These researchers have suggested that public school educators typically operate from a deficit thinking

perspective when examining the achievement issues associated with students of color. Deficit thinking theory refers to the labeling of poor minority students and their families as "disadvantaged," "at risk," and "uninvolved." Deficit thinking theory blames school failure for these students on the students' lack of readiness to learn in the classroom, the parents' lack of interest in their education, and the families' overall lifestyle.

The deficit thinking paradigm has several implications for teachers and students (Delpit, 1995; Valencia, 1991). Those who practice this paradigm use the students' backgrounds as an excuse for failure. In addition, they hold that compared to the students of the more affluent dominant culture, students who are culturally different innately have less competence, less intelligence, less capability, and less self-motivation (McKenzie & Scheurich, 2004).

With the deficit thinking paradigm as one of the foci, McKenzie and Scheurich (2004) conducted a qualitative study that involved the behaviors and thinking patterns of eight white teachers at a small low-income school located in a large urban city. Along with data used to show that many students of color are performing at lower levels than white students, this study provided awareness among educators regarding the equity traps that exist in public schools. When asked why students of color are performing at lower levels than their white counterparts, the teachers' answers had characteristics of four equity traps: "the Deficit View," "Racial Erasure," "Employment and Avoidance of the Gaze," and "Paralogic Beliefs and Behaviors."

Public school educators who operate within the deficit thinking paradigm contend that unless students of color change background factors such as their culture,

values, and family structures, they encounter minimal or no opportunities to have successful outcomes in school. Teachers who accept this paradigm are also saying that their methodologies, pedagogies, teaching practices, and school systems are not responsible. Therefore, as these educators continue to utilize deficit thinking, the students, then, must adapt to the resources and programs in place or run the risk of failure (McKenzie & Scheurich, 2004). According to this approach of deficit thinking, the solutions for improvement or reform are beyond the teachers' and school systems' control and influence.

Changing Demographics

There is a continued and increasing demographic, ethnic, language, and cultural disproportionate match between students and teachers in both public schools and institutions of higher learning (NCES, 2006). Despite efforts to recruit minority teachers, data indicate that the national profile of teacher candidates consists of individuals who are mostly European-American, white, monolingual, middle-class females who have not had significant background experiences with people who are culturally diverse (Gay & Kirkland, 2003).

The ongoing increase in poor, non-white students in public schools warrants the urgency of needing to understand and challenge the beliefs of prospective teachers in teacher education programs. In 1980, the U. S. population consisted of the following: Whites, 79.9%; African Americans, 11.5%; Hispanics, 6.4%; and Asian Americans, 1.6% (NCES, 2006). In 2000, the population showed a change: Whites, 75.1%; Hispanics, 12.5%; African Americans, 12.3%; and Asian Americans, 3.6% (U. S.

Census Bureau, 2006). Racial demographic projections indicate that the U. S. population will experience substantial growth among minority groups by 2050: Whites, 52.8%; Hispanics, 24.5%; African Americans, 13.6%; and Asian Americans, 8.2% (NCES, 2006). The continued change in demographics leading to a majority of non-white students requires teacher preparation programs to be designed to prepare teacher candidates to teach and interact appropriately with non-white students who are culturally diverse. The challenge is not only how to prepare all teachers to work with diverse student groups, but also to discover how they have come to recognize what guides their pedagogy.

Although curricula standards in the area of multicultural education are briefly addressed, Texas, among other states, does not require competency in multicultural education for teacher certification. The demographic composition of culturally diverse students in Texas calls for cohesiveness among teacher preparation programs in the area of multicultural education. Within the student population of Texas, for instance, Hispanics account for 45.3%, and African Americans account for 14.7% (Texas Education Agency, 2006). When compared to the percentages of students of color, white students account for 36.5% and are the minority in Texas. The racial demographics for teachers in Texas show that white teachers are the majority: Whites, 69.4%; Hispanics, 20.1%; and African Americans, 9.1%. This data indicate a disproportionate match between the percentages of students of color and the percentages of teachers of color. Compared to a national average of 12.5% in 2003, 16.2% of the population in Texas is below poverty (United States Census Bureau, 2006). Students considered economically

disadvantaged as a result of free or reduced lunch status account for 55.6% of the student population (Texas Education Agency, 2006). In addition, the Limited English Proficiency label consists of 15.8% of the student population.

Although an external mandate may be useful in initiating the unification that must occur within the multicultural education training component of teacher preparation programs, it must be followed by internal changes that are assessed and evaluated for effectiveness. James A. Banks (1994), one of the key scholars in the multicultural education movement, stated, "Because one of its goals is to increase educational equality for students from diverse groups, school restructuring is essential to make multicultural education become a reality" (p.17). Few research studies have investigated teachers' perceptions regarding their multicultural education training in university teacher preparation programs. One aim of this study was to analyze the perceptions that effective teachers of African American students have regarding the multicultural education training components of an undergraduate elementary teacher preparation program at a highly selective public university in Texas. Elementary school teachers considered to be successful with African American students in a large urban public school district were interviewed to analyze their perceptions regarding the multicultural education training component of the teacher preparation programs that they attended and their current educational practices, beliefs, and attitudes.

Statement of the Problem

Studies indicate that teacher candidates along with teachers who already have classrooms of their own do not feel prepared to instruct students who have different

cultural backgrounds (Gay & Kirkland, 2003; Van Hook, 2002). Practicing teachers are experiencing this lack of preparedness as the achievement gap among African American students persists (Darling-Hammond & Berry, 1999). Although some scholars believe that aspects of multicultural education promote separatism and stereotypes (Champagne, 1997; Langres, 1997), others have asserted that teachers who instruct with insufficient knowledge about dissimilar cultural backgrounds may be contributing to the achievement gap that exists for African American students (Darling-Hammond & Berry, 1999; Ladson-Billings, 1994).

The federal No Child Left Behind Act is requiring that all states show success with all students through the employment of highly qualified teachers. Although there are controversial concerns with the implementation of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) such as disparities in funding, resources, and personnel, significant reform in the area of teacher preparation must result before teachers can even attempt to meet the needs of all students (Darling-Hammond & Berry, 2006). Cochran-Smith (2005) contended that the highly qualified definition, reinforced by the Secretary of Education's reports to Congress on teacher quality (U.S. Department of Education, 2002, 2003, 2004), "focuses almost exclusively on subject matter knowledge and ignores pedagogy and other professional knowledge and skills" (p. 101). Further, Cochran-Smith suggested that these reports assert that in order to produce the teachers required by NCLB, states should abandon teacher preparation requirements not based on scientific research, recruit teachers candidates from other fields, and widely implement alternate routes to teacher certification, allowing anyone enrolled in an alternative program to be deemed as highly

qualified. Despite the focus that NCLB has on improving the achievement of disadvantaged students, these students are the least likely to have well-prepared and experienced teachers (Darling-Hammond & Berry, 2006).

Initiatives that are currently being debated in teacher preparation include equity, diversity, and student achievement. Since multicultural education is comprised of targeting those exact initiatives, it should be a significant priority among reform efforts in teacher preparation, especially if teachers are to be considered highly qualified. The literature on culturally relevant pedagogy has made an important contribution to the field of education in terms of exploring the beliefs and practices of teachers who successfully connected their African American students with academic success (Delpit, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 1994). Theories and research about culturally relevant pedagogy have enhanced knowledge of what pedagogical success entails and how it may be attained.

Not only does culture encompass race, but it also includes differences such as socioeconomic background, ethnic group, language, religion, and tradition (Banks & Banks, 1989; Gollnick & Chinn, 1986; Sleeter & Grant, 1988). For prospective and practicing teachers, multicultural education includes acknowledging that these differences exist, deconstructing their own discourses in order to analyze and monitor personal beliefs, and valuing cultural diversity as the basis for classroom learning. According to Banks and Lynch (1986), "it is important for teachers to come to grips with their own personal and cultural values and identities in order for them to help students from diverse racial, ethnic and cultural groups to develop clarified identities and relate positively to each other" (p. 17). With the growing number of minority students in

Texas, permitting unprepared teachers to instruct culturally diverse students is detrimental to the academic and social progress of African American students (Darling-Hammond, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1994).

The review of literature will discuss the following: (a) historical context of teacher preparation; (b) historical context of multicultural education; (c) research on multicultural education training in teacher preparation; (d) the theoretical framework of culturally relevant pedagogy; and (e) policy issues. This study analyzed elementary school teachers' perceptions of their effectiveness with African American students in a large urban Texas ISD. This study also examined multicultural training in an undergraduate elementary teacher preparation program at a highly selective public university in Texas as it pertains to African American students. The purpose of these investigations was to identify effective and ineffective components of multicultural education training for the elementary teachers. The analysis in this study prompted recommendations for reform in educational practice, teacher preparation programs, and the teacher preparation policy in Texas. Further, this analysis assisted in providing a discussion of the importance of a pedagogical focus on African American students in the multicultural education training components of teacher preparation programs.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to analyze the perceptions of effective teachers of African American students in a large urban Texas ISD. Through document analysis and interviews with selected university faculty, this interpretive qualitative study examined the multicultural education training component that targets African American students in

the undergraduate elementary teacher preparation program at a highly selective public university in Texas. The names of the Texas ISD and the highly selective public university in Texas have been kept confidential through the use of pseudonyms.

The highly selective public university was chosen for this study because it produces prospective teachers who obtain positions in urban school districts. This public university is called highly selective due to its national ranking reported as “more selective” by the U.S. News & World Report (2006). Schools are designated "most selective," "more selective," "selective," "less selective," or "least selective," based on a formula that accounts for enrollees' test scores, class standing, and the percentage of the school’s applicants who are accepted. According to Bowen, Kurzweil, and Tobin (2005), colleges and universities that are considered to be among the elite higher education institutions often establish trends in policy and practice that are emulated by other institutions. The hope is that the data presented in this study will initiate trends that assist in effectively preparing teachers to attain successful outcomes with African American students. Since the Texas ISD is a large urban school district with a growing population of African American students, some elementary teachers’ perceptions were examined regarding their preparation at the highly selective public university as it relates to their effectiveness with African American students.

With a constructionist approach that underlies interpretive qualitative research (Crotty, 2003; Merriam, 2002), Ladson-Billings’ (1995a, 2001) theoretical framework of culturally relevant pedagogy is utilized to examine the extent to which the selected teachers’ beliefs about teaching are consistent with the components of culturally relevant

pedagogy. In addition, the Teach for Diversity program conducted at the University of Wisconsin-Madison serves as a model for examining the current multicultural education training component that focuses on African American students within the undergraduate elementary teacher preparation program at the highly selective public university in Texas. Document analysis and interviews with selected university faculty assisted in examining the teacher preparation program at the university selected for this study. Through an analysis of the various components of this study, recommendations were provided for reform of educational practice, teacher preparation programs, and the teacher preparation policy in Texas.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided this study:

1. What are teachers' perceptions of their effectiveness with African American students in a large urban school district?
2. What are the teachers' perceptions of the preservice preparation that assisted them in their effectiveness with African American students?
3. What other components do the teachers identify that contributed to their effectiveness with African American students?
4. To what extent are the teachers' beliefs about teaching consistent with the components of culturally relevant pedagogy?

This interpretive qualitative study (Merriam, 2002) used the naturalistic inquiry paradigm to guide the research questions (Guba & Lincoln, 1985). The researcher collected data through open-ended, semistructured interviews with campus administrators, teachers, and university faculty. Interviews were transcribed and analyzed for common themes through processes of coding (Merriam, 2002). In addition,

document analysis of syllabi, websites, and catalogs were used to investigate the multicultural education training components of the undergraduate elementary teacher preparation program at the highly selective public university in Texas.

Naturalistic inquiry methods (Guba & Lincoln, 1985) were used to develop an understanding of the phenomenon in the selected area of teacher preparation. This phenomenon was explored by investigating the relationship between teachers' practices with African American students in a large urban Texas ISD and the multicultural education training components within the undergraduate elementary teacher preparation program at a highly selective public university in Texas.

Culturally Relevant Pedagogy as a Theoretical Framework

Using a constructionist approach to make meaning of what the 10 elementary school teachers said about their experiences (Crotty, 2003), culturally relevant pedagogy was used as a theoretical framework through which to examine the extent to which the teachers' beliefs about teaching are consistent with components of culturally relevant pedagogy. Teachers' use of culturally relevant pedagogy has been shown to be effective with African American students (Irvine, 2001; Ladson-Billings, 1994). In "Toward a Theory of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy," Ladson-Billings (1995a) suggested three components that embody culturally relevant pedagogy for prospective and practicing teachers: (a) an ability to develop students academically; (b) a willingness to nurture and support cultural competence; and (c) the development of a sociopolitical or critical consciousness.

After analyzing the teachers' perspectives in this study regarding their effectiveness with African American students, Ladson-Billings' (1995a, 2001) three components of culturally relevant pedagogy will be used to examine the extent to which these teachers' beliefs about teaching are consistent with their practices in the classroom. Although the constructionist approach will assist the researcher in making meaning of the teachers' perspectives about their experiences (Crotty, 2003), Ladson-Billings' (1995a, 2001) theoretical framework of culturally relevant pedagogy requires critical analysis. The review of literature in Chapter 2 will expand on this framework and examine its relevance to teacher preparation, educational practice, and educational policy.

Definition of Terms

The terms in this section have been defined with meanings that relate to this study.

African American Students

For the purpose of this study, *African American students* refers to students in the United States who originated from Africa or whose ancestors came to the United States from the continent of Africa. In other words, these are students of African American heritage (Mitchell & Salsbury, 1999).

Race

As a historical and social process, *race* refers to biologically-based human characteristics that are used to describe a certain group, a culture, or an ethnic group (Grant & Ladson-Billings, 1997).

Cultural Pluralism

Cultural pluralism refers to cultural diversity, equality among groups, and a commitment to the value of diversity in society. Further, cultural pluralism promotes a group's right to preserve and develop its own cultural patterns (Grant & Ladson-Billings, 1997).

Culture

Culture focuses on shared knowledge, belief systems, symbols and meanings, (Bennett, 1999; Gollnick & Chinn, 1998). Further, culture is a "complex web of information that a person learns, and that guides each person's actions, experiences, and perceptions of events" (Campbell, 2004, p. 42).

Ethnic Group

The term *ethnic group* refers to a community of people within a larger society that is socially distinguished or set apart, by others and/or by itself, primarily on the basis of racial and/or cultural characteristics (Banks, 1994).

Multicultural Education

Although various definitions exist for *multicultural education* in the United States, multicultural education is widely recognized as a philosophical concept and an educational reform movement whose major goal is to restructure curricula and educational institutions so that students from diverse backgrounds will experience equal and equitable educational opportunities (Banks, 1994; Grant & Ladson-Billings, 1997).

Significance of Study

As participants in various studies on multicultural education, prospective and practicing teachers have disclosed their concerns about not being prepared to instruct culturally diverse students. The achievement gap that exists among African American students indicates that these concerns are relevant. Teacher preparation programs must make multicultural education an important component when preparing prospective teachers for the classroom as they face the growing population of students who are rich in cultural diversity. Since Texas is experiencing changing demographics with a significant growth in minority and poor student populations, requiring competency in multicultural education for teacher certification is warranted and needed.

Few studies have examined the direct relationship between the multicultural education training component in teacher education programs and teachers who have been successful with African American students. This research may provide insights into how multicultural education training components in teacher preparation programs have been critical in teachers' success with African American students.

Limitations of the Research

Several limitations are evident in this study. One of the most pertinent limitations is the similarity of the researcher's own experiences with those of the participants. Eight years of the researcher's experience has been in urban schools with predominantly African American students. Absolute objectivity was difficult to assume due to personal biases that may have influenced the process of collecting, analyzing, and interpreting data. The researcher's assumption was that many teachers are not prepared to instruct

students with culturally diverse backgrounds in urban schools. Although the researcher's experiences may present some prejudice in perspectives, the perspectives may have served as a heuristic tool to uncover what the participants did not share or what was observed (Patton, 1990).

Further limitations of this study encompass teacher selection and research design. A specific race of teachers was not investigated to explore perspectives unique to a specific culture or race of teachers. Students and parents were not questioned to attain their voice in teacher effectiveness. A specific site was not selected to observe teachers in practice in the classroom at one urban school.

In addition to teachers' perceptions of their effectiveness with African American students, this study focused on the components of multicultural education in a selected university undergraduate elementary teacher preparation program and the perspectives of graduate teachers about the training that they received. A further limitation is presented due to the various time periods in which the teachers attended the teacher preparation program at the university. Because of the nature of the study, generalizability was problematic, a perceived difficulty with qualitative research. However, that is not the intent or purpose of qualitative research or this study. Although the data will be specific to the experiences of teachers in this study, the implications of the data may be useful for similar contexts and areas of study.

Conclusion

Studies indicate that many prospective and practicing teachers are not prepared to instruct culturally diverse students. Teacher preparation programs must make

multicultural education an important component when preparing teacher candidates for culturally diverse classrooms. Since Texas has been experiencing changing demographics with significant growth in minority and poor student populations, competence within the area of multicultural education is warranted and needed in teacher certification. Through interviews teachers considered effective with African American students provided their perspectives on the multicultural education training components present in their teacher preparation program at a highly selective public university in Texas. This information assisted in providing feedback to the selected university teacher program regarding its multicultural education training components, informing the state policymakers as well as other teacher preparation programs about the findings, and noting recommendations for reform.

Chapter 2 provides a review of the literature on teacher preparation and multicultural education. Chapter 2 then examines the research regarding culturally relevant pedagogy and the implications for African American students as well as other minority and poor students. Chapter 2 also discusses policy issues for teacher preparation programs with attention to the state of Texas. Chapter 3 provides an explanation for the primary focus of the research. Chapter 3 then describes the methodology and the rationale for selecting to use qualitative research. Chapter 3 also provides a brief description of participant selection, interview protocols, data collection procedures, and data analysis. Chapter 4 presents the results of the study. Chapter 5 presents an analysis of the emergent themes, provides interpretations, and offers recommendations.

CHAPTER 2: A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

This review of literature will discuss the following: (a) historical context of teacher preparation; (b) historical context of multicultural education; (c) research on multicultural education training in teacher preparation; (d) the theoretical framework of culturally relevant pedagogy; and (e) policy issues. As student achievement concerns become increasingly more challenging across the nation, data indicate that the achievement gap persists for African American students when compared to their white counterparts. To address this concern with student achievement, scholars have been concerned with a focus on teacher education as it pertains to preparation, practice, and educational policy. This review of the literature will begin with a historical context of teacher education along with some of its programmatic requirements and challenges. A historical context of multicultural education will follow, for multicultural education emerged as a response to the concern with attaining academic success for culturally diverse students. Subsequently, multicultural education and its place in teacher preparation will be examined.

Additionally, the review of the literature will examine how culturally relevant pedagogy is linked to multicultural education and how it addresses student achievement among culturally diverse students. As a theoretical framework for this study, culturally relevant pedagogy has implications for teacher preparation and practice as prospective and practicing teachers ponder how to be successful with African American students.

Moreover, along with programmatic requirements for teacher preparation, the literature review will conclude by examining the role of policy in developing and implementing requirements for teacher preparation. Critical race theory will be discussed, as it has been used to examine educational policies that affect African American students.

Teacher Preparation

Since this study focuses on the low achievement of African American students and the role that teacher preparation plays in attaining successful outcomes for this student group, this section begins by examining teacher preparation and its role in teacher and student outcomes. Topics in this discussion include a brief historical development along with an examination of programmatic requirements and challenges that exist within teacher preparation.

Historical Development

Throughout educational history, teacher preparation has been an area of constant reform. In *The One Best System* (1974), David B. Tyack asserted that nineteenth century teachers had minimal formal schooling, for the typical teacher had only attended grammar school. Reform efforts targeted teacher preparation and sought the implementation of qualifications such as a bachelor's degree, preservice internships, and certification exams. In the mid-twentieth century, college preparation began to become a requirement for teacher certification. As a non-traditional route into the field of education, alternative certification is used as a way to recruit teachers, for in many areas, there is a shortage of teachers who are prepared in traditional college and university

teacher preparation programs. Further, certain areas of concern such as student achievement, diversity, and equity have been the rationale for implementing policies that address state teacher education programs.

Challenges in Teacher Education

In *Turning Points in American Educational History* (1967), David B. Tyack suggested that America has had poorly prepared teachers during most of its history. Further, Tyack asserted that America probably had better teachers than it had any right to expect, when one considering their pay and work conditions. When compared to other professions, teaching is often viewed as an occupation that lacks adequate teacher candidates, adequate teacher preparation, and adequate graduate teachers (Tozer, Violas, & Senese, 2002).

Within teacher education, the concepts of *profession* and *professionalization* are problematic (Tozer, Violas, & Senese, 2002). Professionalization is an issue for teachers because of the perceptions regarding talent (Doyle, 1990). Doyle (1990) asserted that researchers generally conclude that the average academic qualifications of those who enter teacher education are lower than that of other professions. In addition, Doyle contended that the higher qualified graduates of teacher education programs are less likely to accept a teaching position or remain for an extended period of time in the occupation. Further, Doyle declared that teacher effectiveness has been an area of concern, for there is often dissatisfaction with the quality of teaching practices and a response that teachers must engage in more innovative practices in order to be successful.

Zeichner and Gore (1990) noted that various challenges have been raised regarding the commonly accepted view that professional education courses have little impact on teacher education students. Further, Zeichner and Gore identified three major components that can potentially exert influence on the socialization of teachers: (a) general education and academic specialization courses, completed outside schools, departments, and colleges of education; (b) methods and foundations courses, usually completed within education units; and (c) field-based experiences, usually completed in elementary and secondary school classrooms. These authors also suggested that prospective teachers bring different perspectives with them into teacher education programs that render the socializing influence of teacher education courses low in impact.

In addition to concerns with socialization, teaching culturally diverse students has also become problematic for teachers as the achievement gap persists for poor and minority students (Darling-Hammond, 2000). Although concepts vary in terms of what students are included in the terminology of culturally diverse, multicultural education is a response to schools' failure with students who are culturally diverse.

Historical Context of Multicultural Education

As a response to schools' failure with culturally diverse students, multicultural education emerged as way to prepare teachers for classrooms with students who have dissimilar backgrounds. This section examines the historical context of multiculturalism in American society and the evolution of multicultural education.

Opposing Forces

The history of public schools in the United States has shown that there have been efforts to ensure the cultural domination of the Protestant Anglo-American culture in the United States (Spring, 2005). The English invasion of North America in the sixteenth century began the struggle for cultural domination in the United States (Zaitchik, Roberts, & Zaitchik, 1994). Some scholars have argued that multicultural education was initiated for various groups such as African Americans, Native Americans, Latinos, Asian Americans, and European Americans when they began to educate themselves about their history, their role, and participation in these histories (Banks, 1994; Grant & Ladson-Billings, 1997). Further, these groups examined how race, class, and gender influence their presence in society, and how their group and other groups contributed to the growth and development of the United States.

When English colonists declared their superiority over Native American cultures, they attempted to force their culture upon Native Americans (Spring, 2005). Native Americans resisted these attempts because of repressive and exploitative measures used to uphold the dominant culture. The formation of public schools in the nineteenth century received considerable challenges among Native Americans, Irish immigration, and African Americans because of the dominance of Anglo-American values (Zaitchik, Roberts, & Zaitchik, 1994). In the twentieth century, culture wars became prevalent as Americanization programs, civil rights movements, and multicultural debates ensued as groups resisted their expected place in the melting pot that many promoted (Tyack, 1974). When Banks (2002) pondered the presence of these opposing forces in history, he

asserted that in every historical period, competing paradigms and forms of knowledge coexist while some reinforce the status quo and others challenge it. This struggle continues in the twenty-first century with the debate over multiculturalism, and it also sparked the multicultural education movement.

Evolution of Multicultural Education

The evolution of multicultural education is marked by precursors such as the intercultural education movement, the ethnic studies movement, and the civil rights movement. The literature on multicultural education is mixed in terms of its objectives but is unified by advocating the need for equal and equitable educational opportunities for all students (Grant & Ladson-Billings, 1997). In the late 1930's, the intercultural education movement began in schools as a response to the linguistic, social, and academic capital needed for second-generation immigrant youth to participate in the mainstream (Grant & Ladson-Billings, 1997). Often associated with the intercultural education movement, the intergroup education movement is considered a precursor to the ethnic studies movement that emerged in the 1960's and 1970's and is linked to the work of multicultural education scholars because its content about religious, national, and racial groups was used to reduce prejudice and discrimination (Banks, 2004; Taba, 1952).

Also a precursor to multicultural education, the civil rights movement, which began in the 1940's and extended into the twenty-first century, demanded the end of school segregation and racism in education (Spring, 2005). Influenced by leaders such as W.E.B. DuBois, the members of the National Association for the Advancement of

Colored People have been credited with a significant influence in the advancement of the civil rights movement. In addition to the actions taken by African Americans, Native Americans and Mexican Americans joined in the efforts to end the domination of Anglo-American culture and values in both societal and educational arenas. Native Americans sought cultural recognition and self-determination while Mexican Americans and Puerto Ricans joined forces in supporting bilingual education and ending school segregation (Spring, 2005). The civil rights movement paved the way for demands that minority cultures be reflected in public school education. This social movement that sparked multicultural education was "grounded in social protest, emancipation, and social change" (Sleeter, 1991).

The concept of multicultural education has varying goals, definitions and underlying philosophies about its intentions. However, it is marked by a global awareness of achieving equity and equality for students in K-12 institutions and teacher preparation in higher education institutions (Grant & Ladson-Billings, 1997). The terminologies that served as catalysts for multicultural education have evolved to comprise the philosophical beliefs and educational processes that are held by various scholars today. Banks (1973) wrote about *ethnic studies* or *multiethnic education* and is recognized as one of the first to introduce the concept of multicultural education before he and other scholars such as Grant (1977), H. P. Baptiste, Jr. and M. L. Baptiste (1979), and Gollnick and Chinn (1983) began to use the term multicultural education.

Scholars define and conceptualize multicultural education according to its goals, practices, and the social groups it targets (Sleeter, 1991). Some scholars address race and

ethnicity (Bennet, 1986; Gay, 1983) while others address race, ethnicity, and gender (Baptiste & Baptiste, 1979). Although earlier works included only race and ethnicity, Gay's (2003) focus later evolved to address race, ethnicity, and language. With a multiple foci, some scholars have addressed factors such as race, ethnicity, language, gender, social class, and disability (Banks & Banks, 1989; Gollnick & Chinn, 1986; Sleeter & Grant, 1988). In a survey of literature on multicultural education, Sleeter and Grant (1988) found that the only commonality shared among definitions for multicultural education was that the reform was designed to improve schooling for students of color. The primary notion seems to be that all students, regardless of their cultural backgrounds, will have an opportunity to learn in school through both equal and equitable means (Banks, 1994; Grant & Ladson-Billings, 1997). Thus, as early as the 1970's, the multicultural movement began to evolve into the 1980's and 1990's as a result of demands for equity and equality for a number of diverse groups.

Those who opposed multiculturalism argued for the need to draw from one single unifying culture in public school education. That single culture happened to be the Anglo-American culture. In opposition to multiculturalism, historian Arthur Schlesinger (1991) wrote, "For better or worse, the white Anglo-Saxon Protestant tradition was for two centuries—and in crucial respects still is—the dominant influence on American culture and society" (Spring, 2005, p. 405). Schlesinger argued that English and European values should be the core values that unify students in the nation because the institutions and culture of the United States are products of these values. With another opposition to multiculturalism, D'Souza (1996) argued that multicultural dilemmas stem

from the problem with African Americans not being competitive with other groups in society. With an emphasis on democratic ideals and social justice, leaders of the multicultural movement such as James A. Banks, Christine Sleeter, and Carl Grant have continued to respond to the critiques of and oppositions to multicultural education by advocating the empowerment of oppressed people through the integration of the history and culture of minority groups into public school curricula and textbooks (Spring, 2005).

When examining what challenges multicultural education and influences the perpetuation of the status quo, Banks (2002) asserted that the cultural communities in which individuals are socialized are also epistemological communities that have shared beliefs, perspectives, and knowledge. Further, the groups who exercise the most power within a society heavily influence what knowledge becomes legitimized and widely disseminated. Banks' observations of the ways in which people approach change can be connected to the ways in which educational policies influence the implementation of multicultural education in schools and in teacher preparation programs. For instance, although some states and accrediting agencies for teacher preparation programs have implemented policies that govern the implementation of multicultural education, there is currently no national policy that addresses how multicultural education should be implemented in teacher preparation programs (Mitchell & Salsbury, 2000).

When King (2005) examined the ways in which diverse interests impact political culture, he noted that the United States of America "has always been a nation made up of different peoples, nationalities and ethnicities. Yet Americans have historically spent a good deal of effort in denying this plurality and finding mechanisms with which to

discriminate against diverse interests" (p. 116). Recognizing how hegemonic forces challenge ideals of multicultural education, Sleeter (1996) argued that multicultural education has become disassociated in many schools from its roots in social movement, partly through the increased involvement of white educators. Despite challenges to the implementation of multicultural education, many schools and teacher preparation programs have joined in the efforts to include multicultural education in their school climate and curricula, but the debate continues.

Multicultural Education in Teacher Preparation

Within the multicultural education movement, scholars have focused on how teacher preparation programs can address issues like student achievement, diversity, and equity through multicultural education training components. Unfortunately, few empirical studies have been conducted that investigate multicultural education training components in teacher preparation programs. Also few in number, some qualitative studies have focused on how prospective teachers view the multicultural education training received in their teacher preparation programs. Further, some scholars have suggested components that teacher preparation programs should implement when preparing teacher candidates for diverse student populations.

Grant and Secada (1990) asserted that most of the scholarship on preparing teachers for facilitating classrooms of diverse learners is not based on empirical studies. As cited by Grant and Secada (1990), Grant & Sleeter (1985) categorized studies of multicultural education training components in teacher preparation in the following typology: teaching the different child, human relations, single-group studies,

multicultural approaches to education, and education that is multicultural and social reconstructionist. Further, Grant and Secada (1990) noted relevant empirical studies in their review of the various categories of multicultural education.

In a study involving the typological category of teaching the different child, Mahan (1982) immersed 291 student teachers in the Navajo and Hopi cultures. Because of the immersion techniques, the results were positive in all areas that were investigated: student attitude, involvement, employment success, and supervising teacher evaluations.

In a single-group study conducted by C. T. Bennet (1979), students were sensitized to social forces that lead to negative assumptions regarding racial and cultural groups and were required to select and focus on one of the following racial and/or cultural groups: Black Americans, Japanese Americans, Jewish Americans, American Indians, and Spanish-speaking Americans. Compared with students in a control group, students in the experimental group were more positive in their attitudes toward members of ethnic groups in general and toward Jewish, Japanese, American Indian, and Spanish-speaking Americans specifically. No group differences were found between experimental and comparison groups on their perceptions of Black Americans.

In a human relations study, Moultry (1988) surveyed teacher candidates and found that the students showed a lack of empathy for minority problems with regard to institutional racism. Further, students demonstrated a lack of knowledge about indirect, non-proximate causes or human actions and expressed a lack of confidence in education and politics as sources for change in the way that people think and act relative to pluralistic values.

In their review of studies that employed education that is multicultural and social reconstructionist, Grant and Secada (1990) could not find any studies that fit this component. The social reconstructionist component is significant to some multicultural education scholars because it focuses not only on attaining successful outcomes for diverse student populations, but it also focuses on equipping educators and students to challenge the status quo (Ladson-Billings, 1999). Grant and Secada (1990) concluded that more research is needed in the effective ways that multicultural training components should be implemented. In addition, their review of studies focused on multicultural training components in teacher preparation programs did not offer enough detail or conclusive enough evidence to argue that the selected approaches were effective ways of offering multicultural preservice education.

Van Hook (2002) conducted a study in which she explored the barriers that teacher candidates believe can prevent them from creating a successful multicultural education for their students. The barriers included the following: (a) difficulty discussing sensitive topics; (b) policies and practices detrimental to diversity; (c) difficulty implementing a diversity curriculum; (d) developing curriculum and teaching strategies; and (e) inability to recognize and accept diversity. Van Hook noted that the majority of teacher candidates have not experienced significant exposure to diversity in their backgrounds.

In a study involving mostly European-American, white, monolingual, middle-class females whose interactions with people of color have not been sustained or substantive, Gay and Kirkland (2003) found that preservice teachers need to develop a

"critical consciousness" about diversity that involves self-reflection. The authors suggested that this self-reflection includes prospective teachers analyzing and monitoring their personal beliefs and instructional tendencies to the extent that cultural and ethnic diversity are valued and approached with the intent to provide a successful learning environment for culturally and ethnically diverse students. When attempting to initiate self-reflection among the candidates in their teacher education program, Gay and Kirkland noted obstacles that they experienced. They noticed that the candidates often diverted their attention away from the topic, engaged in silence, or displayed guilt to avoid discussing the issues among their beliefs. Gay and Kirkland found that they needed to establish expectations in their teacher education program that made self-reflection and cultural critical consciousness the norm within the learning climate. Other strategies included guided practice, modeling, and cooperative learning. Gay and Kirkland concluded that some teachers fail to implement an effective multicultural curriculum because of factors that they perceive to be hindrances.

Addressing the preparation of middle-class white teachers has been the focus of several studies in the area of multicultural teacher education because many of them communicate a lack of experiences with culturally diverse backgrounds (Bell, 2002; Gay & Kirkland, 2003; Sleeter, 2001). In a review of literature on multicultural education in teacher preparation, Sleeter (2001) addressed the need for effective preparation strategies for teachers of color. Despite literature that noted some African American teachers' difficulties in relating to poor African American students (Lee & Slaughter-Defoe, 2004), Sleeter (2001) suggested that "preservice students of color bring a richer

multicultural knowledge base to teacher education than do White students" (p.95). Ladson-Billings (1994), however, conducted a study in which both African American teachers and white teachers shared their success with African American students. Ladson-Billings shared eight teachers' stories and presented descriptive scenarios to demonstrate pragmatic application of the concepts and models from which to learn or to emulate.

Although some teachers have reached successful outcomes with diverse student populations, researchers have argued that many prospective teachers are not prepared to be effective with diverse students and have called upon teacher preparation programs to address the concern (Grant & Secada, 1990). Noting the challenges that exist in preparing teachers to attain successful outcomes with diverse student populations, Zeichner (1996) suggested key instructional strategies of teacher education for diversity:

1. Admissions procedures screen students on the basis of cultural sensitivity and a commitment to the education of all students, especially poor students of color who frequently do not experience success in school.

2. Students are helped to develop a clearer understanding of their own ethnic and cultural identities.

3. Students are helped to examine their attitudes toward other ethnocultural groups.

4. Students are taught about the dynamics of prejudice and racism and about how to deal with them in the classroom.

5. Students are taught about the dynamics of privilege and economic oppression and about school practices that contribute to the reproduction of societal inequalities.

6. The teacher education curriculum addresses the histories and contributions of various ethnocultural groups.

7. Students are given information about the characteristics and learning styles of various groups and individuals are taught about the limitations of this information.

8. The teacher education curriculum gives much attention to sociocultural research knowledge about the relationships among language, culture, and learning. Students are taught various procedures by which they can gain information about the communities represented in their classrooms.

9. Students are taught how to assess the relationships between the methods they use in the classroom and the preferred learning and interaction styles in their students' homes and communities.

10. Students are taught how to use various instructional strategies and assessment procedures sensitive to cultural and linguistic variations and how to adapt classroom instruction and assessment to accommodate the cultural resources that their students bring to school.

11. Students are exposed to examples of the successful teaching of ethnic- and language-minority students.

12. Students complete community field experiences with adults and/or children of another ethnocultural group with guided reflections.

13. Students complete practicum and/or student teaching experiences in schools serving ethnic- and language-minority students.

14. Students live and teach in a minority community (immersion).

15. Instruction is embedded in a group setting that provides both intellectual challenge and social support.

Various scholars have suggested components of multicultural education in teacher preparation. Sleeter (1991), for instance, addressed empowerment as a critical component of multicultural education and as a vehicle for social change and emancipation for oppressed groups. Gay (2003) addressed the importance of teacher

efficacy and empowerment, peer modeling, storytelling, and reflection in preparing teachers to become multicultural educators.

In *An Introduction to Multicultural Education,* James A. Banks (1994) clarified the aims of multicultural education:

> Education within a pluralistic society should affirm and help students understand their home and community cultures. However, it should also help free them from their cultural boundaries. To create and maintain a civic community that works for the common good, education in a democratic society should help students acquire the knowledge, attitudes, and skills they will need to participate in civil action to make society more equitable and just. (p. 1)

Further, Banks asserted that five dimensions of multicultural education should exist: content integration, an equity pedagogy, knowledge construction process, prejudice reduction, and empowering school culture and social structure (Banks, 1991; Banks, 2004). Ladson-Billings (1995b) used these five dimensions as a rubric for reviewing multicultural teacher education in 42 articles published between 1988 and 1992 and found that none embodied all five dimensions.

Culturally Relevant Pedagogy

When reflecting on specific multicultural education practices that researchers have noted as successful with African American students, culturally relevant pedagogy emerges as one clear example. Culturally relevant pedagogy is considered a form of multicultural education that has been successful with African American students as well as other minority and poor students (Irvine, 2001; Ladson-Billings, 1995a). Ladson-Billings defined culturally relevant pedagogy as "a pedagogy that empowers students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically by using cultural referents to impart

knowledge, skills, and attitudes" (pp. 17-18). Furthermore, teaching that is culturally relevant "uses student culture in order to maintain it and to transcend the negative effects of the dominant culture" (p. 18).

Recalling the struggles, hopes, and dreams in the past of African Americans, Gloria Ladson-Billings' *The Dreamkeepers: Successful Teachers of African American Children* (1994) projected the insistent need for education to connect schooling and the African American experience through the stories of eight teachers. To assist in making this connection, Ladson-Billings discussed the relationship of pedagogy and practice specific to the needs of African American students. In addition, Ladson-Billings exposed the implementation of culturally relevant pedagogy in a classroom and why culturally relevant pedagogy is significant to the education of African American students. To offer recommendations for teacher practice, Ladson-Billings (1994) defined the common conceptions of self and others, social relations, and knowledge that successful teachers of African American students employ and deem them culturally relevant teachers.

In addition to the three conceptions regarding self and others, social relations, and knowledge, Ladson-Billings (1995a) later devised a theoretical framework regarding the three criteria that culturally relevant teachers must meet: (a) an ability to develop students academically; (b) a willingness to nurture and support cultural competence; and (c) the development of a sociopolitical or critical consciousness. In *Crossing Over to Canaan: The Journey of New Teachers in Diverse Classrooms* (2001) Ladson-Billings provided indicators of the three criteria that define the theoretical framework of culturally relevant pedagogy.

Culturally relevant teachers who have an ability to develop students academically exhibit the following characteristics (Ladson-Billings, 2001):

1. The teacher presumes that all students are capable of being educated.

2. The teacher clearly delineates what achievement means in the context of his or her classroom.

3. The teacher knows the content, the learner, and how to teach content to the learner.

4. The teacher supports critical consciousness toward the curriculum.

5. The teacher encourages academic achievement as a complex conception not amenable to a single, static measurement.

Culturally relevant teachers display a willingness to nurture and support cultural competence through the following characteristics (Ladson-Billings, 2001):

1. The teacher understands culture and its role in education.

2. The teacher takes responsibility for learning and about students' culture and community.

3. The teacher uses student culture as a basis for learning.

4. The teacher promotes a flexible use of students' local and global culture.

Culturally relevant teachers foster the development of a sociopolitical or critical consciousness through the following characteristics:

1. The teacher knows the larger sociopolitical context of the school-community-nation-world.

2. The teacher has an investment in the public good.

3. The teacher plans and implements academic experiences that connect students to the larger social context.

4. The teacher believes that a student's success has consequences for his or her own quality of life.

Ladson-Billings' (1994; 1995a) work with culturally relevant pedagogy extends previous scholarship that focused on the significance of students' culture in student achievement. Often used interchangeably with culturally relevant pedagogy, similar terms implying that teachers should incorporate elements of the students' culture in their teaching include culturally responsible, culturally responsive, culturally congruent, culturally compatible, and culturally appropriate (Irvine & Armento, 2001).

Mohatt and Erikson (1981) conducted a study that investigated the differences in classroom interactions between Native American students and their white and Native American teachers. These authors used the term culturally congruent to describe the teachers who had the most effective interactions with students through adjustments in their own speech patterns, communication styles, and classroom participation structures to resemble more closely those of the students' own culture.

Au and Jordan (1981) conducted a study in which teachers worked with Hawaiian students to improve their reading performance by focusing on reading comprehension rather than by using phonics and decoding strategies. Instead, the teachers employed "cultural appropriateness" by placing an emphasis on telling stories through use of their home communication called "talk story."

Ladson-Billings' (1994; 1995a) ideology behind culturally relevant pedagogy exists alongside more recent research that focused on how teachers' knowledge of students' cultural backgrounds contributes to student success. Irvine & Armento (2001)

used culturally responsive pedagogy to convey that teachers should react appropriately in the instructional context by not following one teaching method or the same teaching methods and materials for all students. Further, culturally responsive teachers adapt their teaching methods and materials to meet the needs of individual students and build relationships with their students by allowing them to talk freely about their experiences, families, and communities.

Utilizing the context of culturally relevant pedagogy in a more recent study, Howard (2002) conducted a qualitative case study that examined African American elementary and secondary students' descriptions of teaching practices and learning environments within urban contexts. Although the study did not measure student achievement as a variable, the student interpretations identified three central teaching strategies that had a positive affect on student effort, engagement in class content, and overall achievement. The three key strategies were described in the findings: (a) teachers who establish family, community, and home-like characteristics; (b) teachers who establish culturally connected caring relationships with students; and (c) the use of certain types of verbal communication and affirmation.

Teach for Diversity and the University of Wisconsin-Madison

Education scholars have called attention to the need for programmatic models that focus on preparing prospective teachers for success with diverse students (Grant & Secada, 1990; Zeichner, 1996). The Teach for Diversity program formerly at the University of Wisconsin-Madison emerges as one model of a program that has been effective in preparing prospective teachers for diverse student populations (Ladson-

Billings, 1999, 2001). Not only is the University of Wisconsin-Madison recognized as one of the nation's top research universities, its School of Education is rated among the top five for scholarly productivity and the quality of its graduates (Ladson-Billings, 1999; U.S. News & World Report, 2006). The elementary education component of teacher education is one of the university's more popular majors. The University of Wisconsin-Madison has been noted for its attention to race in teacher preparation like other programs such as Boston College, Santa Clara University, the University of New Orleans, the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, and the CULTURES program at Emory University (Ladson-Billings, 1999). As a result of the high number of applicants, the School of Education at the University of Wisconsin-Madison has had to become highly selective in its admission process. The attention to social reconstruction (Zeichner, 1991) and reflective practice (Zeichner & Liston, 1987) has helped to refine the School of Education's focus on multicultural education in the teacher preparation programs (Ladson-Billings, 1999).

Gloria Ladson-Billings (2001), education professor at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, studied the experiences of eight students participating in the University of Wisconsin-Madison's Teach for Diversity master's program that began in 1994 with a focus on developing culturally relevant teachers. Along with three letters of recommendation, a statement of purpose, and a 3.0 grade point average on the last 60 credits of their undergraduate degree (or a strong Graduate Record Examination score), the students also had to express commitment to principles of equity, diversity, and social

justice (Ladson-Billings, 1999). Teach for Diversity was a 15-month rigorous program that introduced students to working with diverse students by starting in the community:

1. Six-week assignment for 10-12 hours a week in a community-based agency;
2. Two initial courses entitled Teaching and Diversity and Culture, Curriculum, and Learning;
3. Placement in an elementary school with a representative number of students of color for an academic school year with an ongoing community service commitment;
4. Three integrated methods courses; and
5. Two final courses called School and Society and Child Development.

Teach for Diversity had four major themes:

1. Community entities and teachers must better understand the communities in which they teach.
2. Teaching is an unfinished profession.
3. The best teachers of diverse students constantly work on their practice, looking for new and better ways to enhance student learning.
4. Self-reflection is an important skill in teacher development.

The Teach for Diversity program established that multicultural education's goal is to use students' experiences as the foundation for understanding and learning. Ladson-Billings was careful to note the challenges that existed with the program regarding attrition, cost, faculty workload, omitted courses, and teachers' experiences (Ladson-Billings, 1999, 2001). Although Teach for Diversity is currently in moratorium as faculty members ponder the structure of the program, Ladson-Billings (1999) found that many of the students left the program "profoundly changed" (p. 239).

A Look at Policy

Although current school reform efforts have targeted teacher preparation programs, the achievement gap continues to exist for African American students. Certain areas of concern such as equity, diversity, and student achievement have served as the rationale for implementing policies that address state teacher education programs with some policies focusing on components of multicultural education. With a closer focus on the state of Texas, this section examines some of the external influences on education policy that affect teacher preparation programs.

Multicultural Education in State Policies

Some states have implemented various components of multicultural education in their teacher preparation policies. Mitchell and Salsbury (2000) conducted a study in which participants responded to questions regarding state practices with multicultural education. At least fifteen states have reported the implementation of multicultural education programs or policies (Mitchell & Salsbury, 2000). These states include Illinois, Oregon, South Dakota, Tennessee, Washington, Delaware, New Mexico, New York, Iowa, Massachusetts, Nebraska, Utah, Wyoming, Florida, and North Carolina. Of these fifteen states, at least seven states require a multicultural education training component in teacher certification: Delaware, Iowa, Massachusetts, Nebraska, New Mexico, New York, and Wyoming. Further, Delaware, New Mexico, and New York have populations that are demographically the most similar to Texas with the percentage of poor and minority students and have reported that they implement components of

multicultural education in their teacher certification policies (U.S. Census Bureau, 2006).

Department of Education websites were used for the four states to collect data on student demographics. These states show diversity in the largest percentages of minority groups in their populations. In Texas, Hispanics account for 45.3% of the student population, and African Americans account for 14.7% of the student population (Texas Education Agency, 2006). In Delaware, African Americans account for 31.9% of the student population, and Hispanics account for 7.9% of the student population (Delaware Department of Education, 2006). In New Mexico, Hispanics account for 52% of the student population, and Native Americans account for 11% of the population (New Mexico Public Education Department, 2006). In New York, African Americans account for 19.9% of the student population, and Hispanics account for 18.9% of the student population (New York State Education Department, 2006).

In comparison to a national average of 12.5% in 2003, the following represents state percentages of persons below poverty: Texas, 16.2%; New York, 14.3%; New Mexico; 17.7%; and Delaware, 9.0% (United States Census Bureau, 2006). A comparison of the percentage of students considered to be economically disadvantaged as a result of free or reduced lunch status is as follows: Texas, 55.6%; New York, 44.1%; New Mexico, 52.4%; and Delaware, 35.4%. A state comparison of students with Limited English Proficiency is as follows: Texas, 15.8%; New York, 7.2%; New Mexico, 17%; Delaware, 4%. As the data indicate, all of these states have instructional implications for culturally diverse students.

As a part of certification requirements, teachers prepared in these states must show competency in courses related to various topics considered to represent multicultural education (Mitchell & Salsbury, 2000). These topics include preparing prospective teachers to instruct students who have diverse cultural and language backgrounds. However, the states vary in how the objectives are approached among the different teacher preparation programs. For instance, New York requires its teachers to receive instruction in cultural and language diversity; however, the teacher preparation programs can determine how to approach these topics. Further, alternative certification programs must provide "historical, social, and legal foundations of education, including special education, the education of students with limited English proficiency, and multicultural education" (New York State Education Department, 2006). Delaware requires a three-credit course in multicultural education for all of the state's prospective teachers. New Mexico requires specified coursework in bilingual multicultural education.

These four states reported challenges in preparing their teachers to instruct diverse students (Mitchell & Salsbury, 2000). Delaware reported that the lack of understanding among many educators and the public regarding the value of multicultural education programs for all students were the greatest challenges. In New Mexico the greatest challenges were ensuring the students' understanding of the deep meanings of culture and how those learning experiences could be incorporated in the K-12 curriculum. New York reported that the greatest challenge was the actual definition of multicultural education.

Despite these challenges, these states have identified the need to implement a multicultural education policy that affects teacher certification. Although Texas currently has no state multicultural education program, the respondent noted that the greatest improvement in this area would be to require coursework in multicultural education for teacher certification. The respondent noted that the most significant problems facing multicultural education are the fear of the non-European-American microcultures by European-American Texans and the growing number of people of color throughout the state.

Even with the persistence of the achievement gap among poor and minority students, Texas has no specific coursework requirements in the area of multicultural education to equip prospective teachers for the growing percentages of minority and poor students. The respondent suggested that the greatest improvement in this area of teacher preparation for Texas would be to implement a policy that requires multicultural education for teacher certification. Thus, an important critique of the multicultural education policies in Delaware, New Mexico, and New York is the broad nature in which the training component is conceptualized for teacher certification.

Evolution of the Texas Teacher Preparation Policy

In the state of Texas, the teacher preparation policy was implemented through a collaborative process that involved the local school districts, colleges, and education service centers (NCAC, 2004). Through the Texas Education Agency, the participants from these entities develop the curricula requirements, based on the standards provided by the state of Texas, that are believed to be necessary to prepare prospective teachers

for the classroom. With the Texas Administrative Code (TAC), this policy attempts to align the curricula of the alternative certification program closely with the curricula of the state's traditional teacher preparation program.

Emphasis on Multicultural Education

Since multicultural education began to emerge as a widely-recognized term in the 1980's, an examination of how multicultural education has been addressed in the Texas teacher preparation policy will be provided. In 1981, the curricula standards of the TAC (Title 19, Administrative Code, Section 137.212) specified that an institution seeking approval for undergraduate level elementary teacher preparation shall design its program of general education so that each teacher candidate recommended for certification "shall have a knowledge and understanding of the multicultural society of which he is a part." Further, an institution had to show evidence that its general program of education was designed "to give emphasis to the multicultural aspects of society" and ensure that each teacher candidate recommended for certification had a "knowledge and understanding of our multicultural society." Within the TAC (Title 19, Administrative Code, Section 137.281), teacher candidates pursuing bilingual specialization had to have a cultural component that emphasized "concepts of the culture," "cultural patterns of the target population," and "cultural contributions of the target population."

Although no changes occurred to multicultural components within the curricula standards and the bilingual specialization for undergraduate level elementary teacher preparation from 1982 to 1995, the TAC (Title 19, Administrative Code, Section 141.63) required that "cultural dynamics of family relationships" be implemented in the

curriculum for teacher candidates as specified in the descriptors for the area of specialization. This area of study emphasized "changes throughout the family life" and "the interactive role of the family members and the processes of family life from early marriage through grandparenting, including the similarities and differences of familial life styles and their effects on families and children."

In 1996 Title 19, Administrative Code, Section 137.191, addressed preparation required in all programs and required that the content within the multicultural component emphasize "the impact of cultural, ethnic, language, and social differences upon instructional processes." In addition, within Title 19, Administrative Code, Section 137.199, the early childhood endorsement for pre-kindergarten and kindergarten required that "cultural diversity of learners and families" be included in the curriculum. No changes were made in 1996 to the multicultural components neither within the bilingual specialization nor within the descriptors for the area of specialization.

Although no changes occurred within the multicultural components for curricula standards and for the bilingual specialization since 1999, the Texas Administrative Code (Title 19, Part 7, Chapter 228, Rule §228) now requires teacher preparation entities to "provide evidence of on-going and relevant field-based experiences throughout the program, as determined by the collaborative, in a variety of educational settings with diverse student populations, including observation, modeling, and demonstration of promising practices to improve student learning." No mention of the implementation of "cultural dynamics of family relationships" was made as it had been prior to 1999 in the descriptors for the area of specialization. Further, competency in multicultural education

is not addressed in the Texas Examinations for Educator Standards (TExES) or in the Examination for the Certification of Educators in Texas (EXcET), two examinations that teacher candidates must pass in order to be certified teachers.

Issues Within the Texas Teacher Preparation Policy

A contradictory component exists in the Texas teacher preparation policy that addresses the diverse field experiences of teachers prepared in both traditional and alternative certification programs. In a policy study using critical theory as a theoretical framework, Young (1999) called attention to the difference between policy rhetoric and practiced reality that can provide insight into the contradictory element of the teacher preparation policy in Texas that addresses field experiences with diverse student populations. Young's mention of the difference between policy rhetoric and practiced reality indicates that policies often imply one objective, but the reality is noticeably different than the objective that the policy intended. The teacher preparation policy in Texas states that all entities wishing to implement a teacher preparation program must comply with the same state requirements, and the requirements include alternative certification programs. One of those requirements focuses on field experiences for prospective teachers.

Multicultural education scholars have argued that teacher preparation programs must implement field experiences that immerse students in schools with diverse student populations (Ladson-Billings, 1999; Zeichner, 1990). The Texas Administrative Code (Title 19, Part 7, Chapter 228, Rule §228) requires teacher preparation entities to "provide evidence of on-going and relevant field-based experiences throughout the

program, as determined by the collaborative, in a variety of educational settings with diverse student populations, including observation, modeling, and demonstration of promising practices to improve student learning." Within this policy, undergraduate teacher certification candidates must complete a full-day teaching practicum at a minimum of 12 weeks; however, alternative certification routes can allow their candidates to complete their field-based experience as classroom teachers for a full school year on a probationary certificate. The policy is contradictory, for it asserts that all teacher preparation programs must meet the same requirements; however, the practiced reality is that it allows some alternative certification programs to be avenues for new teachers to enter the classroom without adequate exposure to the intended best or "promising" teaching practices that should include experiences with diverse student populations.

Easton's systems framework provides insight into how policy gaps exist among policy rhetoric and practiced reality. Easton (1957) described how environmental demands or stresses become policy inputs that are converted within the political system into policy outputs that are driven back into the environment (Heck, 2004). The motivation, or demand, that led to the implementation of the teacher preparation policy in Texas was to communicate expected standards of teacher preparation programs. The federally-mandated No Child Left Behind Act requires teachers to be highly qualified. The need for certified, or highly qualified, teachers is the "black box" that Easton derived in his systems theory. The Texas Administrative Code (Title 19, Part 7, Chapter 228, Rule §228) calls for teacher preparation programs to provide ongoing and relevant

field-based experiences throughout the program in a variety of educational settings that have diverse student populations. As a result of a policy output, teachers who are not prepared in traditional programs are allowed to facilitate classrooms without field experience in diverse settings. Consequently, there is a difference between the policy rhetoric and practiced reality.

Because of teacher shortages in some areas, these teachers without experience are being hired simply because there are no other qualified applicants to fill these classrooms. Some alternative certification programs in Texas "err on the side of getting prospective teachers into classrooms too early (NCAC, 2004)." Many new teachers who enter the field of teaching through college or university teacher preparation programs tend to leave the field within five years. In 1999, the Center for Education Information (CEI) conducted a study in which states with alternative certification programs were asked to offer some reasons for the high attrition rate among new teachers in their first few years of teaching. One of the reasons given is that the teachers receive minimal support and professional development as beginning teachers (NCAC, 2004). According to research cited by Darling-Hammond (2000), fully prepared and certified teachers receive higher performance ratings and are more successful with students than teachers without full preparation.

In his research on alternative teacher certification, Michael Podgursky (2004) asserted, "it is well established in the research literature that schools with high concentrations of minority and poor students have higher teacher turnover rates." In relation to the type of certification held in Texas, the percentage of teachers assigned to

predominantly minority and economically-disadvantaged schools in 2002 is as follows: standard certification, 69.1%; post-baccalaureate, 66.2%; and alternative certification, 60.2%. Evidently, there is a high percentage of teachers who are being assigned to schools with predominantly poor and minority students.

There has been a concern in this nation about the declining numbers of minority teachers that go through traditional teacher education programs and the declining percentage of the teaching force that consists of minority teachers. In Texas, however, the number of minority teachers prepared in traditional teacher preparation programs has been increasing. For instance, in 1995, at least 23.4% of minority teachers were prepared in traditional teacher preparation programs, but in 2002, at least 30.9% of minority teachers were prepared in traditional teacher preparation programs (Fuller & Alexander, 2004). Hiring minority teachers and teachers with similar backgrounds to the students' backgrounds seems to be a strategy to help to meet the needs of diverse students. Data results indicate that the number of alternatively-prepared minority teachers in Texas is increasing; nevertheless, attrition rates have not been significantly affected overall.

Many teacher preparation programs in Texas and in other states have begun to look more closely at their programs in order to implement any necessary reform. Teachers who are entering classrooms too soon and without field experiences with diverse student populations may be part of the reason why concerns like equity and the achievement gap among minority and poor students still exist (Darling-Hammond & Berry, 1999; Darling-Hammond, 2000).

NCATE as a Proponent of Multicultural Education

Multicultural education scholars have noted the influence of external policies on the implementation of multicultural education training components in teacher preparation programs (Ladson-Billings, 1999; Tom, 1996). The National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) is only one accreditation agency for institutions that have teacher preparation programs, but its attention to multicultural education has provided institutions with external pressures that effected change in the way that teacher preparation programs approached multicultural education. The U.S. Secretary of Education officially recognizes NCATE as the national professional accrediting agency for schools, colleges, and departments of education that prepare teachers, administrators, and other professional school personnel (NCATE, 2006). Influenced by the Commission on Multicultural Education's work, NCATE began to devise standards to examine how teacher preparation programs addressed the multicultural education of its teacher candidates in 1979 (Ladson-Billings, 1999; Tom, 1991).

By 1981, NCATE expected institutions seeking accreditation to implement components of multicultural education and later moved from a separate multicultural standard to integrated multicultural components. As cited by Tom (1996), Nicklin (1991) asserted that in a 1990 revision of its multicultural standards, NCATE found that of the first 132 institutions considered under the revised standards, more than half were found to have a significant focus on cultural diversity. Although the impact of NCATE's emphasis on multicultural education with regard to the composition of student bodies

and faculty cannot be readily determined, NCATE's feedback applied pressure on higher education institutions to change their practices (Tom, 1996).

Currently, NCATE publishes six standards for accreditation of teacher preparation programs: candidate knowledge, skills and dispositions; assessment system and unit evaluation; field experiences and clinical practice; diversity; faculty qualifications, performance, and development; and unit governance and resources (NCATE, 2006). With a focus on diversity, standard four maintains that "the unit designs, implements, and evaluates curriculum and experiences for candidates to acquire and apply the knowledge, skills, and dispositions necessary to help all students learn. These experiences include working with diverse higher education and school faculty, diverse candidates, and diverse students in P–12 schools" (NCATE, 2006).

P-16: An Evolving Reform Initiative in Texas

The P-16 Initiative in Texas focuses on how to provide access to higher education for public school students through a series of reform efforts that often affect policy. Since this initiative involves closing the achievement gap that exists between white students and minority students, the pertinence of multicultural education in teacher preparation programs is apparent as entities collaborate to implement their plans for reform.

Historical Development of P-16

In 1998, the National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL) began intensive work with state legislators to find better ways to connect K-12 and higher education policy in a legislative environment (Van de Water & Rainwater, 2001). Joint efforts

began with an Institute at Stanford University in 1999 in which K-12 and higher education legislative leaders from 15 states began to work with leading national experts on P-16 (sometimes called K-16) reform.

With Texas as a significant collaborator, a number of states are taking steps to create a seamless transition between three largely disconnected levels of public education – preschool, K-12, and postsecondary. New challenges in the United States that have sparked these efforts include the following: demographic shifts, changes in the economy and in the workplace, and continuing advances in technology and telecommunications.

In order to create a more integrated, seamless education system, states have been grappling with complex issues that include standards, testing, teacher education, college admissions policies, governance, funding streams, and institutional turf issues. Over the past decade, states have begun to move away from dealing with such issues on a gradual basis in favor of a more comprehensive approach. P-16, the shorthand term for such initiatives, "reflects the central vision of a coherent, flexible continuum of public education that stretches from preschool to grade 16, culminating in a baccalaureate degree" (Van de Water & Rainwater, 2001).

P-16 and Multicultural Education

Within the P-16 initiative, collaborators have established major goals that states should strive to implement. According to Van de Water and Rainwater (2001), the following are among the major goals of the P-16 initiative:

1. Expanding access to early learning for children ages 3 to 5, and improving their readiness for kindergarten,
2. Smoothing student transitions from one level of learning to the next,
3. Closing the achievement gap between white and minority students,
4. Upgrading teacher education and professional development,
5. Strengthening relationships between families and schools,
6. Creating a wider range of learning experiences and opportunities for students in the final two years of high school, and
7. Improving college readiness and college success.

The P-16 initiative calls for closing the achievement gap between white and minority students. Ladson-Billings (2000) asserted that a key component in promoting student achievement is through multicultural education. According to authors of *Closing the Gaps by 2015*, Texas is profiting from a diverse and growing population, "yet this prosperity could turn to crisis if steps are not taken quickly to ensure an educated population and workforce for the future" (THEC, 2000). Enhancing preparation and professional development of early learning professionals is a critical component in implementing an effective multicultural education.

Critical Race Theory

Critical race theory is discussed in this section with an emphasis on how scholars have historically used its concepts to critique education and the preparation of teachers.

Emergence of Critical Race Theory

As an outgrowth and a separate entity from an earlier movement called critical legal studies, critical race theory began in the mid-1970's as a response to the slow pace

of racial reform in the United States (Delgado, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 1999). Legal scholar Derrick Bell is considered the father of the critical race theory legal scholarship movement (Ladson-Billings, 1999). Bell suggested that interest convergence was one factor that determined the outcome in *Brown v. Board of Education* because Whites had an interest in ending racial segregation just as African Americans did with the neutral principle of racial equality (Bell, 1980). According to Bell (1980), desegregation meant economic and political advances for Whites in policymaking decisions.

As cited by Ladson-Billings (1999), critical legal studies scholars challenged the traditional legal scholarship that focused on doctrinal and policy analysis (Gordon, 1990). Further, Crenshaw (1988) noted that critical legal studies challenged the notion that the civil rights movement represents a long, steady advancement toward social transformation. Moreover, critical legal studies stems from Gramski's (1971) notion of "hegemony" to describe the legitimacy of the status quo that perpetuates oppressive structures in American society (Ladson-Billings, 1999). Delgado (1995), for instance, asserted that racism is normal rather than aberrant.

According to Ladson-Billings (1999), critical legal studies challenged the mainstream legal ideology for its portrayal of United States society as a meritocracy, but it "fails to provide pragmatic strategies for material and social transformation" (p. 212). Further, it holds that Whites have been the main recipients of civil rights legislation (Ladson-Billings, 1999).

Tate (1997) outlined five defining elements of critical race theory:

1. Critical race theory recognizes that race is endemic in U.S society, deeply engrained legally, culturally, and even psychologically.

2. Critical race theory crosses epistemological boundaries. It borrows from several traditions, including liberalism, law and society, feminism, Marxism, postructuralism, critical legal studies, cultural nationalism, and pragmatism, to provide a more complete analysis of "raced" people.

3. Critical race theory reinterprets civil rights law in light of its limitations, illustrating that laws to remedy racial inequality are often undermined before they can be fully implemented.

4. Critical race theory "portrays dominant legal claims of neutrality, objectivity, colorblindness and meritocracy as camouflages for the self-interest of powerful entities of society."

5. Critical race theory challenges ahistoricism and insists on a contextual/historical examination of the law and a recognition of the experiential knowledge of people of color in analyzing the law and society.

In addition to Tate's outline of the elements that define critical race theory, Ladson-Billings (1999) noted that critical race theory departs from mainstream legal scholarship by sometimes employing storytelling or "voice" to "analyze the myths, presuppositions, and received wisdoms that make up the common culture about race and that invariably render Blacks and other minorities one-down" (p. xiv). On the subject of race, Apple (1999) suggested that race is a social construction with a set of fully social relationships. Further, critical analyses in education devote considerably more attention to the politics of "whiteness" that underpins both new social identities and important aspects of educational policy. Goodwin (2002) asserted, "We will need to move beyond superficial 'celebrations' of diversity and face our own racism, discrimination, inequity, and injustice" (p.172). Recognizing the critiques of essentialism toward race, Tate

(1997) maintained that critical race theory is a "tool for the maintenance of racial subordination" (p. 236) and that the defining elements can provide novel and innovative ways of examining educational policy, research, and practice regarding equity.

Critical Race Theory in Teacher Preparation

In "Toward a Critical Race Theory of Education," Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) extended legal uses of critical race theory by challenging traditional multicultural education paradigms and suggesting that race has remained untheorized in terms of education. Although Ladson-Billings and Tate recognized the importance of gender- and class-based analyses, their assertions included the following regarding race: (a) race continues to be significant in the United States; (b) U.S. society is based on property rights rather than human rights; and (c) the intersection of race and property serves as an analytical tool for understanding inequities in society. In their critique, these authors suggested that multicultural education, while initially conceptualized as a reform movement designed to bring about educational equity for diverse racial, ethnic, and social groups, has become synonymous with the term *diversity* used to encompass all differences such as racial, ethnic, cultural, social, gender, ability, and sexual orientation. Further, when examined in practice, multicultural education in schools has been reduced to a superficial intervention, often focusing on an introduction of artifacts and cultures. Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) compared the ways in which multicultural education has strayed from its original goals of addressing educational equity to the liberal ideology of civil rights law that offers no radical change for the inequities perpetuated by the status quo.

Ladson-Billings (1999) suggested four ways in which critical race theory informs educators about the preparation of teachers for diverse populations.

1. Teacher educators committed to preparing teachers for effective practice in diverse schools and communities are working with either small, specialized groups of like-minded prospective teachers or resistant, often hostile prospective teachers.

2. Many teacher preparation programs treat issues of diversity as a necessary evil imposed by the state and/or accrediting agency.

3. Critical race theory can be a way to explain and understand preparing teachers or diversity that moves beyond both superficial, essentialized treatments of various cultural groups and liberal guilt and angst.

4. Critical race theory perspective helps to ferret out the way specifically designed programs for preparing teachers for diverse student populations challenge generic models of teaching and teacher education.

Ladson-Billings (1999) asserted that the lens of critical race theory assists in critiquing what teacher preparation programs make of difference, social justice, and diversity. Scholars have employed the use of critical race theory in examining the school experiences of African American students. For instance, employing the use of voice, a characteristic of critical race theory in analyzing the role of racism in shaping schools and practices, Berry (2005) examined the stories of two African American male middle school students who have experienced success in mathematics. The study revealed the following five broad themes: (a) early experiences, (b) aggregated individual discrimination, (c) support systems, (d) drawing upon school/community resources, and (e) self-empowerment. Berry sought to examine the tracking system that prevails in public schools and to show that high achievement can be attained among African American males.

In another study, Solorzano and Ornelas (2004) utilized critical race theory to examine the access and availability of Advanced Placement courses and how they impact educational outcomes for Latina/o and African American students. In an analysis of a school district in California that serves a large population of Latina/o and African American students, Solorzano and Ornelas made recommendations based on their findings of three different patterns that emerged around access and availability of AP courses: (a) Latina/o students are disproportionately underrepresented in AP enrollment district-wide; (b) schools that serve urban, low-income Latina/o and African American communities have low student enrollment in AP courses; and (c) even when Latina/o and African American students attend high schools with high numbers of students enrolled in AP courses, they are not equally represented in AP enrollment.

Using the language of critical race theory through two studies involving white preservice teachers, Marx and Pennington (2003) addressed Whiteness and White racism with their White preservice students to assist them in becoming more aware of the advantages and biases inherent in their positionality as White teachers. The authors found that they were able to establish ways of speaking about Whiteness that moved both the researchers and the participants to a more critical and more empowered understanding of race and Whiteness.

King and Wilson (1990) examined the ways in which "cultural domination denies the legitimacy of our Afro/human legacy and obstructs humanely equitable existence" (p. 22). Tate (1999) asserted, "Critical race scholars are engaged in a dynamic process seeking to explain the realities of race in an everchanging society" (p. 235).

Further, critical race theory should be viewed as an iterative project of scholarship and social justice. Within her discussion of critical race theory, Ladson-Billings (1999) urged multicultural education scholars to be mindful of the radical reform that must occur with the racial oppression that exists in public schools.

Conclusion

This review of literature discussed a brief historical context of teacher preparation, challenges in teacher preparation, the historical context of multicultural education, research on multicultural education training in teacher preparation, the theoretical framework of culturally relevant pedagogy, and policy issues. Data indicate that the achievement gap persists for African American students when compared to their white counterparts. To address this concern with student achievement, scholars have been concerned with a focus on teaching. Multicultural education emerged as a response to the concern with teacher preparation and practice.

A number of programmatic requirements for teacher preparation and practice have been recommended to include culturally relevant pedagogy. As a theoretical framework for this study, culturally relevant pedagogy has implications for teacher preparation and practice as prospective and practicing teachers ponder how to be successful with African American students. Along with programmatic requirements for teacher preparation, scholars have examined the role of policy in developing and implementing those requirements. Critical race theory is useful in both examining educational policies that affect African American students and teacher preparation programs.

Chapter 3 will provide the following: (a) an explanation for the primary focus of the research; (b) the methodology and the rationale for selecting to use qualitative research; and (c) a brief description of participant selection, interview protocols, and data collection procedures.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Research Questions

The primary focus of this study was to analyze the perceptions of effective teachers of African American students. The following research questions were investigated in this study:

1. What are teachers' perceptions of their effectiveness with African American students in a large urban school district?

2. What are the teachers' perceptions of the preservice preparation that assisted them in their effectiveness with African American students?

3. What other components do the teachers identify that contributed to their effectiveness with African American students?

4. To what extent are the teachers' beliefs about teaching consistent with the components of culturally relevant pedagogy?

Rationale for Qualitative Research

Guba and Lincoln (1985) defined qualitative research as adaptability in dealing with multiple realities. Further, in comparison to quantitative research, qualitative research more directly allows the transactions between the researcher and the respondents to facilitate an assessment of the influences and value patterns present in the phenomenon. Crotty (2003) asserted, "Meanings are constructed by human beings as they engage with the world they are interpreting" (p. 43). This interpretive qualitative research used a constructionist approach to make or "construct" meaning of what the selected teachers said about their experiences in the interviews (Crotty, 2003; Merriam, 2002).

Research Design

The purpose of this research was to contribute to knowledge in the field, assist people in understanding the nature of a problem, and generate solutions to human and societal problems (Patton, 1990). The naturalistic paradigm serves this study well as it defines the transactions between the researcher and the respondents (Guba & Lincoln, 1985). Purposive sampling was used to select teacher graduates of an undergraduate elementary teacher preparation program at a highly selective public university in Texas.

Controversial debates occur between quantitative and qualitative researchers and have been ongoing for a sustained period of time. Positivists are advocates of quantitative and experiential methods to test their hypotheses and generalizations. Qualitative researchers advocate the phenomenological inquiry paradigm. Although qualitative methods were used in the investigation, this study also utilized quantitative data to support the rationale for a qualitative study of the phenomenon.

With constructionism underlying this interpretive qualitative study, naturalistic inquiry methods were used to investigate the phenomenon (Guba & Lincoln, 1985). The study is phenomenological in nature because it explored the phenomenon of teachers' experiences and their interpretations or way of making sense of their surroundings (Patton, 1990).

Drawing generalizations will be problematic due to the small sampling in the study. Purposive sampling, however, was used to ensure information that is rich in intensity and experiences. No studies have directly explored the connection between the multicultural education training components of the university chosen for this study and

the experiences of the teachers who are considered to be successful with African American students in the selected school district.

Participants

Purposive sampling maximizes the researcher's ability to devise a thick description of the qualitative analysis (Guba & Lincoln, 1985). The participants attended an undergraduate elementary teacher preparation program at a highly selective public university in Texas. The participants for the study were purposively selected using the following criteria:

- Teach in an urban K-5 public school,
- Teach predominantly African American students, and
- Have at least three years of teaching experience.

Although principals could have nominated both males and females as effective teachers of African American students, only females were nominated. Ten elementary female teachers at 5 different elementary campuses participated in this study. The average age of the teachers was 33.6 years old. The average years of teaching experience was 11.7 years. The racial breakdown of the 10 teachers is as follows: White, 4; African American, 2; Hispanic, 2; and biracial as Hispanic and White, 2.

Nomination Process

Using the Academic Excellence Indicator System (AEIS) available at the Texas Education Agency, state criteria were used to identify urban schools that have been effective with African American students. School administrators at these selected schools nominated teachers that they consider to be effective. Further, the school

administrators determined the criteria for nominating teachers identified by them as "effective." Teachers identified themselves as those who have experience teaching African American students.

The nomination phase of participant selection included a letter that described the study, the criteria, and the nomination process. The school administrators filled out and submitted the nomination forms for review. A questionnaire was provided to the nominated teachers asking them to identify their university teacher preparation program, years of experience, teaching experience at specific grade levels, and beliefs regarding their effectiveness with African American students. The initial selection interview verified teachers' understanding of the concepts of the study. During the initial interview, a consent form describing the context of the study and the purpose of the study was used to ensure the confidentiality of the information shared with the researcher.

Description of the School District

The teachers who participated in this study work in a large urban Texas ISD. The Texas ISD serves approximately 79,707 students on 107 campuses. The racial demographic information for the school district is as follows: Hispanics, 54.7%; Whites, 29.0%; African Americans, 13.4%; Asian/Pacific Islanders, 2.8%; and Native Americans, 0.2%. Determined by free and reduced lunch status, economically disadvantaged students account for 58.7% of the student population. Students who are Limited English Proficient (LEP) represent 22.8% of the student population. The racial demographic information for the teachers in this district is as follows: Whites, 67.6%;

Hispanics, 23.9%; African Americans, 7.1%; Asian/Pacific Islanders, 1.3%; and Native Americans, 0.1%. Chapter 4 will provide a profile of the participants' individual campuses.

Data Collection

Selected teachers were given questionnaires based upon the outcome of nomination forms. After assessing the information attained in the questionnaires, the researcher interviewed 10 teachers by using open-ended questions in semistructured interviews. An interview protocol was used to ask general questions first before moving on to more specific questions.

Interviews were audio taped and transcribed. Open coding was used to identify common themes that emerged from the interviews. Member checking was used after the transcriptions were completed in order to establish credibility (Guba & Lincoln, 1985). This gave the researcher an opportunity to debrief with the respondent, gather any additional information volunteered by the participants, and ensure the accuracy of the transcribed information and interpretation of the participants' experiences.

In addition, document analysis of syllabi, websites, and catalogs was used to investigate the multicultural education training component of the undergraduate elementary teacher preparation program at the highly selective public university in Texas. Interviews with 2 university professors from the highly selective public university in Texas supplemented the information obtained from documents related to the undergraduate elementary teacher preparation program.

Data Analysis

Open, axial, and selective coding processes were used to identify themes in the transcribed interviews (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Strauss and Corbin (1990) defined coding as the "operations by which data are broken down, conceptualized, and put back together in new ways" (p. 56). Open coding is used during conceptualization, the initial phase of analysis, to determine which concepts are identified, grouped, and categorized (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 123). Axial coding is the process of making connections between the categories identified during the open-coding process (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Selective coding involves organizing the categories around central themes that emerge during the open- and axial-coding processes (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

Since data collection and analysis can occur literally at the same time, the researcher had an opportunity to review the data and make connections throughout the analytic process (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Strauss and Corbin (1998) contended, "Analysis is not a structured, static, or rigid process. Rather, it is a free-flowing and creative one in which analysts move quickly back and forth between types of coding, using analytic techniques procedures" (p. 58). In addition, trustworthiness was utilized to ensure credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability of the study (Guba & Lincoln, 1985). Within the naturalistic paradigm, these four terms are the equivalents for the conventional terms *internal validity*, *external validity*, *reliability*, and *objectivity.* This practice of trustworthiness serves as a way to show how this research can be a contribution to the field of study.

Credibility

Credibility involves producing credible findings and interpretations (Guba & Lincoln, 1985). Triangulation was used in this study, for interviews and questionnaires served as two different sources of data collection. To address any concerns with accuracy, member checks were also used to ensure that the data, categories of themes, interpretations, and conclusions represent the participants' realities. Prolonged engagement was established by spending several hours with the participants to confirm any questions about the interviews and to address any distortions present in the interviews.

Transferability

Transferability involves providing thick description so that others can make judgments about whether or not a transfer is possible (Guba & Lincoln, 1985). Thick description was used in this study when presenting data, categories of themes, interpretations, and conclusions regarding the participants.

Dependability

To ensure that dependability is addressed, caution is warranted in data collection methods and in how the data are organized, managed, and analyzed (Guba & Lincoln, 1985). Although this type of caution was taken in this study, triangulation was also used as a way to enhance dependability.

Confirmability

Using a combination of techniques assisted in establishing confirmability in this study. These techniques included the confirmability audit, triangulation, and the

reflexive journal as suggested by Guba (1981, cited in Guba & Lincoln, 1985). An audit trail was established through the use of field notes, transcriptions, document analysis summaries, and recordings of interviews.

Discussion of Techniques

By giving attention to credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability, several techniques were used in this study to establish its trustworthiness. Prolonged engagement, a reflexive journal, and member checking were essential in producing a useful audit trail. The hours spent with the participants assisted in clarifying data and addressing distortions. Extensive field notes and the reflexive journal were useful in recording thoughts about the participants, places, data, and documents.

Through member checking, the participants were given an opportunity to ensure that the interpretations were consistent with their intended meanings. Each participant was given a copy of transcriptions to make clarifications or additional contributions. In addition, each participant was given a copy of the first draft to make further clarifications and contributions.

Theoretical Framework

As a part of data analysis and interpretation, Ladson-Billings' (1995a, 2001) theoretical framework of culturally relevant pedagogy was used to examine the extent to which the teachers' beliefs were consistent with the components of culturally relevant pedagogy. Although this is an interpretative qualitative study (Merriam, 2002), Ladson-Billings' (1995a, 2001) theoretical framework of culturally relevant pedagogy requires a critical approach to data analysis.

Conclusion

This chapter explained the methodology of data collection and analysis that was used in this study. Chapter 4 will present the results of all data collected that pertains to the interviewed participants in this study and the undergraduate elementary teacher preparation program at the highly selective public university in Texas.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

The main purpose of this chapter is to report the data collected from the 10 participants who were nominated for this study by their principals as effective elementary school teachers of African American students. Teachers and principals from 5 different elementary campuses in a large urban Texas ISD participated in interviews for this study. Academic Excellence and Indicator System (AEIS) reports provided by the Texas Education Agency (TEA) from the 2005-2006 school year were used to supplement information given by principals and teachers.

Since teachers were nominated from multiple schools in the large urban Texas ISD, data will be reported by giving a profile for each campus along with profiles of each teacher nominated from that campus. When teacher profiles are presented in this section, remarks from the principals who nominated each teacher as an effective teacher of African American students will be provided. Each principal provided personal information, campus demographic information, and rationales for nominating the teachers who participated in this study. Each teacher will be described along with personal information and their assigned positions to give the reader broader insight about the teacher. Finally, as the data were analyzed, common themes emerged for all teacher participants that include the following: (a) perceptions of culture, (b) beliefs about teaching, (c) academic accountability, (d) teacher preparation, and (e) contributions to success.

After the campus and teacher profiles are presented, profiles and reporting of the data will be provided for the highly selective public university in Texas, the

undergraduate elementary teacher preparation program, and the university faculty. The names of the teachers, principals, elementary campuses, university, and university faculty will be kept confidential through the use of pseudonyms.

Thomas Elementary School: Maria and Cassandra

Campus Profile

Thomas Elementary School is located on the east side of the school district with approximately 417 students. The ethnic distribution of the students is as follows: African Americans, 43.6%; Hispanics, 55.4%; Whites, 0.7%; and Native Americans, 0.2%. This school receives federal Title I funding as a result of the Economically Disadvantaged students on free and reduced lunch that account for 96.4%. Limited English Proficient (LEP) students account for 33.1%. The ethnic distribution of the teachers is as follows: African Americans, 26.7%; Hispanics, 27.3%; and Whites, 46.1%. The average years of teaching experience is 9.2 years.

During the 2005-2006 school year, the school was designated a TEA Recognized rating based on campus performance indicators that include the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS), consisting of standardized tests in math, reading, writing, and science for specified grade levels that include third, fourth, and fifth grades. Schools can receive a rating of Exemplary, Recognized, or Low Performing. This is the first time that Thomas Elementary School has received a Recognized rating since the implementation of TAKS in the 2002-2003 school year. Until the 2005-2006 school year, the campus has been rated Academically Acceptable under the TAKS administration since its implementation.

Thomas Elementary School is a neighborhood school that has a sign identifying the campus as the "best elementary school." The office area was conservatively decorated like the principal's office. The marquee displayed school information in both English and Spanish.

An African American woman in her late 40's, Loretta Marshall, the principal of Thomas Elementary School, nominated Maria Sanchez, a second grade teacher, and Cassandra Sellers, a kindergarten teacher, as effective teachers of African American students. Ms. Marshall has been in education for 24 years and the principal of Thomas Elementary School for 8 years.

Maria

I see children. As far as I'm concerned, it doesn't matter the color of their skin or their background. I look into their eyes, and I see them.

Principal Nomination

Teaching Practices. For the interview with Loretta Marshall, the principal of Thomas Elementary School, the researcher met her in her office in February. Ms. Marshall expressed that she nominated Maria as an effective teacher of African American students because she develops a rapport with her students, holds them accountable for learning, understands the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS), and incorporates students' interests. She also proclaimed that Maria places an emphasis on writing, the relevance of what students are learning, and rationales for students' learning.

High Expectations. Ms. Marshall indicated that Maria gains students' trust and holds high expectations for them. Further, she informs them of where they stand in the class with their academic performance and tells them where they need to be at certain academic intervals.

Academic Accountability. According to Ms. Marshall, 65% of Maria's students were where they needed to be in order to be promoted to third grade on classroom assessments and the Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA), a reading evaluation that the school district requires to assess students' reading progress. Thomas Elementary School is a Reading First campus, so the teachers use data and interventions to help students meet reading standards. Students in second grade should reach a level 30 on the DRA by the end of the school year. As indicated in tables 4.1 and 4.2, the average reading scores in Maria's class have improved as the students were tested at the beginning of the year (BOY), middle of the year (MOY), and end of the year (EOY) for both 2005 and 2006.

Table 4.1

Average DRA Scores for All Students

All Students	DRA BOY	DRA MOY	DRA EOY
2005	21.88	28.88	31.25
	(n = 17)	(n = 16)	(n = 16)
2006	15.85	22.78	28.56
	(n = 13)	(n = 18)	(n = 18)

Table 4.2

Average DRA Scores for African American Students

African American Students	DRA BOY	DRA MOY	DRA EOY
2005	22.46	29.33	31.33
	(n = 13)	(n = 12)	(n = 12)
2006	16.00	23.09	29.09
	(n = 7)	(n = 11)	(n = 11)

Building Relationships. Ms. Marshall reported that Maria is not hesitant about calling parents or writing notes home. With discipline, Ms. Marshall proclaimed the following about Maria's classroom:

> Those are the only kids that I see with her that have discipline issues--just three little boys. Two actually have some anger issues, but she doesn't write them referrals for it. What she does is she tells them that it's not a referral, but I need you to go speak with Ms. Marshall or Ms. Rodriguez just to get yourself back together. We're kind of getting them to cool off. It works. I think students respect that she's not sitting down and writing this referral. They communicate about it.
>
> Her thing is to have them write about what made you feel like you did. What is it that is making you yell out today because you weren't yelling out yesterday? What makes you not be able to cooperate with your peers? It's kind of like a reflective thinking that kids have to do. What that's helped is that it makes the kids more aware that they have control of their actions.

Administrative Support. Ms. Marshall informed the researcher that she believes the following about the role of the school in the students' achievement:

> I think our main role is making sure that there is a wonderful teacher in the classroom, a teacher who is highly qualified and effective with children in general. I do believe effective strategies and things that work with all kids can work with African American kids, too. I think you have to realize that and make that known. Our role is to make sure that the resources that teachers need are there and the support they may need in the sense of when a child is having an issue.

> I think also just making sure that I hold the teachers accountable to the kids that they have. Holding myself accountable, too, and all of us here, is part of what you want to do for the children.

Ms. Marshall commented that when Maria stayed home with her children for a few years, she chose to come back to Thomas Elementary School, even after having the choice to teach somewhere else. She believes that Maria is at Thomas Elementary School because she wants to be there.

Personal Background

Professional Background. When the researcher met with Maria Sanchez, a second grade teacher, in her classroom for the initial interview during the month of February, she identified herself as a Hispanic woman in her late 40's. Her classroom had student work lining the walls, and learning centers were organized throughout the room.

In 1994, Maria graduated with a bachelor's degree in elementary education from the undergraduate teacher preparation program at the highly selective public university in Texas that was chosen for this study. She has been teaching for a total of 13 years with 6 of those years being at her current campus, Thomas Elementary School. Her teaching experience has been at 6 different schools with 2 of the 4 schools having similar student demographics to Thomas Elementary School. The other 4 schools have predominantly white students, and the majority of the students have a socioeconomic status of middle class. Although she has taught second grade for a total of 8 years, she has also taught first grade for 1 year, third grade for 2 years, and fourth grade for 2 years.

The majority of Maria's students have been African American for the past 6 years. In her class of 22 students, 65% of the students are African American while 35% are Hispanic. Maria referred to the socioeconomic status of her students as low. Nearly 100% of her students receive free lunch.

Cultural Background. Maria Sanchez identified herself as a Christian woman who is both Hispanic and Mexican American. Maria identifies most with the Hispanic and African American cultures. As a child, she attended schools in which the majority of the students were Hispanic and from low socioeconomic backgrounds. An African American teacher in her mid 20's is one of Maria's best friends. Maria commented on how her friend prefers being called Black instead of African American.

Maria's grandparents were immigrants from Mexico. Like her parents, Maria was born in the United States along with her seven sisters and four brothers. Maria's mother was a homemaker, and her father held various positions with the city. When discussing her own socioeconomic status as a child, she described it as "upper low class" because she did not feel impoverished as child, even with such a large family:

> We thought we were all right because we never went hungry or anything like that, but there's such a thing as upper low class. We went shopping and got our clothes in August. My older siblings used to work for the bases, so they used to bring back money and help out my mom and dad. By the time we grew up, we had enough money. I remember getting presents on Christmas and on birthdays. We were never really poor.

Divorced with two adult children from her previous marriage, Maria does not live in the same neighborhood as her students. She lives in a town just north of her large urban school district, and she described the homeowners in her neighborhood as upper

middle-class with residents that are predominantly white. Before they graduated from high school, her children attended their neighborhood school. According to Maria, approximately 60% of the students in their neighborhood school are white with African American and Hispanic students equally accounting for the other 40%.

Perceptions of Culture

When thinking about cultural differences, Maria described Hispanic immigrants from Mexico as being "a little more timid and quiet and a little more reserved" than the "Americanized" Hispanics that have "come out of their shell." Maria remarked that "culture just has to do with beliefs and experiences one has throughout their upbringing." Maria also commented on differences between herself and her students. She thought about how she and her students differ in their language by saying that they have "cool talk" and like to "coin words." Maria has used the language differences between herself and her students to help students relate to content and to add interest for them. She disclosed that she has to "keep up" with the way that her students speak.

> You have to take that into consideration with their writing and their spelling because of the way they talk. You have to think, okay, your spelling could be wrong, but maybe it's not because they don't have it phonetically; it's just that they are spelling the way they hear it, or the way they've heard it. I've got to think about that at least in spelling as well as in grammar.

Maria is aware of the achievement gap that exists for many African American students in public schools. Throughout Maria's teaching career, she has had the opportunity to work in schools in which the majority of the students are from affluent backgrounds and schools in which the majority of the students live in poverty. Maria was able to compare the schooling experiences of both affluent and poor students. While

working in a school where the majority of the students live in poverty, Maria has seen poor students experience home environments that are "so much for their little minds." She attributes their achievement concerns to some of the "baggage that they have to carry" associated with low socioeconomic status and single parenting. Maria remarked that the African American and Hispanic students in her school have a handicap before they even begin going to school due to their low socioeconomic status: "They don't have those Leapfrogs, those trips that they take over to camp over the weekend, and these great experiences that they've experienced before they even get to school."

In the schools where the students have affluent backgrounds, Maria expressed that "they've already got a head start way before they even get to school" because the "money makes a difference." However, Maria does not think of the difference in socioeconomic status as a barrier to education. For instance, she talked about an African American student in her class this year who has an extensive vocabulary and contributes to discussions openly and very competently. Although the student can sometimes be "a little domineering," she has emerged as a leader, getting along with others and remaining enthusiastic about learning.

According to Maria, interpersonal relationships with students and parents are pertinent when the goal is to build relationships. Playing jump rope and limbo are just some of the ways that Maria interacts with her students outside of the classroom to assist her in building a rapport with them. As an incentive for doing homework, the students have the opportunity to eat with Maria at lunch on Fridays. Maria has observed that the students enjoy eating lunch with her so much that she will often surprise students by

having lunch with them on days other than Friday to recognize them for various accomplishments.

Maria has found that she has similarities with her students, and she has related her academic experiences to her students' academic experiences:

> We all daze out, so don't take it personal and think I'm picking on you. I can relate to whenever they are having trouble because I've had trouble. I've been a student myself. I've told them, don't try that on me; I've already gone through your age. I've got two kids that I've raised that have gone through your age. I said that I've already seen it all. They ask me, "Ms. Sanchez, you got eyes in the back of your head?"

With parents, Maria strives to build relationships just as she does with her students. According to Maria, parents appreciate her sense of humor, her fairness, and her honesty. Even in difficult interactions with parents, Maria proclaimed that she has been successful with parents because of her commitment to fairness and honesty in all situations.

Beliefs About Teaching

Maria holds the belief that "all students can learn if you find out what it is they are good at." Maria shared that she finds out what her students' abilities are, and she meets them where they are by accepting them as they are. With that information, Maria believes that her students "have the potential of becoming the best that they can be." Maria also discussed how students' academic needs require her to make sure that they have the basics in the curriculum. This allows her to "catch the holes" that are keeping the students from "succeeding to the next level." Maria commented on how her students' personal needs require that she recognize her students as individuals. She enjoys

spending time with her students at lunch and at recess in order to get to know them on a "one-one-one basis."

When thinking about excellence, Maria shared her perspective on students making straight A's:

> I think of straight A's, and I think of stress. Not everybody is a straight A student. I think excellence is to everybody's own scale. A little kid that can achieve straight C's is excellent to me because that is the best that he can do.

Maria remarked that the most important things she can teach her students are to give respect if they want it in return, to put forth their best at all times without giving up, and to be present with their thoughts when they are in the classroom learning.

Maria indicated that she makes sure that the needs of her students are met by helping them refocus when they get frustrated. She encourages them to keep trying while she renders her support. With classroom management, Maria has been successful with her African American students by not challenging them and by taking their experiences into consideration. For instance, if students walk in "with an attitude," Maria gives them time and space to calm down. She also allows them to "save face" by giving them the opportunity to make choices:

> You don't challenge. If you challenge the kids, they are going to buck up to you. So you give them as much respect as you can, keep your calm, and that's what throws them off. If you raise your voice right up to them, that's when you lose it. Whatever it is that you try to say, they are going to do it in a bigger tone.

Academic Accountability

In addition to benchmark assessments at the beginning and middle of the school year, Maria conducted formal and informal supplemental assessments:

> Just today, I went ahead and set up some centers for math, and I have three different areas such as money, telling time, and just adding with manipulatives. I would take one kid at a time, and I knew more or less what it was they were having trouble with, and I tutored them. So I learned one on one what their problems are. With this tutoring periodically that I do, I get to catch them. It's individual assessment, and you get that feedback right there and then.

When working to close the achievement gap for her students, Maria said that she has to know what the curriculum requires. She accommodates students' learning styles in order to assist in closing their learning gaps: "You have to find out where they are and what it is you have to do to get them to that point."

When sharing her beliefs about standardized testing, Maria talked about the advantages and disadvantages:

> I think we do need some kind of reference in order to be measured as to how we are doing and compare us to others. But I don't think it's fair because students with higher socioeconomic backgrounds are born with a Leap Frog and all the exposure. A parent gets to stay home, and they have the two parent family. They get a head start. Plus, they've got the comforts of what money can acquire. Then, of course, there's the lower socioeconomic status, and it's a big challenge for students.

Teacher Preparation

University Coursework. Maria attended the undergraduate elementary teacher preparation program at the highly selective public university in Texas in the early 1990's and graduated in 1994 with a bachelor's degree in elementary education. When thinking about the university coursework that prepared her to be successful with African American students, Maria remembered one course with a title similar to Cultural Differences that she felt had offensive undertones of stereotyping:

> I think they were sort of stereotyping and saying that all poor people will live with the way conditions are without even attempting to do otherwise. That was a

> little offensive. My dad worked for the city, and there were a lot of children in my family, but my dad would not have let a broken faucet sit there. He would have done something about it.

Growing up with 12 siblings caused a financial strain for Maria's family, but Maria holds the belief that her parents were not content with living in dire conditions. Therefore, she was offended in the one class that addressed culture and poverty because she could not identify with the stereotyping that she perceived was in the content that the instructor delivered to the class.

For an emphasis on multicultural education, Maria remembered reading some chapters, but she claimed that "getting book ready is not the same as experience." You can't live life in a book." When reflecting on effective teaching strategies shared in her coursework, Maria talked favorably about the resources such as websites, books, and libraries. Her instructors exposed her to research that would give her effective tools for the classroom.

Field Experiences. In Maria's teacher preparation program, exposure to diverse populations was acquired through volunteer opportunities and student teaching. Maria completed a year of student teaching in which she observed during the fall semester and taught during the spring semester. Her student teaching experience assisted in preparing her to be successful with African American students. The campus was located in the central part of the large urban school district selected for this study, and all socioeconomic backgrounds were present. Maria recalled that not only African American students attended the campus, but also White, Asian, Hispanic, and Indian students were enrolled. Maria commented that she loved working with students from so

many different cultures. Of all the cultures that were represented, approximately 60% of the students were white.

Contributions to Success

Maria contributed much of her effectiveness with African American students to her mentor teacher and her own personal beliefs about students. Maria's mentor teacher was an African American woman who served as her "best model" as a teacher. Maria described herself as "human," whereas her mentor was not because she emitted perfection in her work as a teacher.

According to Maria, it was not necessarily academics that prepared her for her success with African American students. She commented that she learned as she progressed throughout years of teaching: "I think a lot of it has to do with heart."

When reflecting upon her personal beliefs about students, Maria proclaimed that her effectiveness with African American students is also due to her ability to "see children."

> As far as I'm concerned, it doesn't matter the color of the skin or the background. I look into their eyes, and I see them. It's going to make me cry. I think of all the little darlings, and I cry.

When discussing the role of the school in the students' achievement, Maria acknowledged that her school has an environment in which she was happy to return after staying home to care for her children. According to Maria, "a lot of the teachers that are here want to be here, and the kids know it." Maria admires how Ms. Marshall, the principal at her campus, allows teachers to leave if they do not want to be there because

they will be resentful if they are there against their will. When thinking about her decision to return to Thomas Elementary School after a hiatus at home, Maria claimed, "I knew where I was appreciated. I knew I could make a difference. It's all the teachers' attitudes."

Maria recalled the years when she worked with students from affluent backgrounds, and she has seen concerns that occur in students' lives because of situations in their personal lives or family backgrounds that have nothing do with finances:

> I see kids as kids. I have seen the best of kids. If you tend to stereotype, that would break the mold. These children are just the opposite of what some people believe as the stereotype. It doesn't matter how high of a socioeconomic status you have or what kind of comforts money can buy; it's still more who you want to be. The children here have a lower socioeconomic status, but they are content with the idea of getting a bowl full of macaroni and cheese. That's wonderful for them. You make the best of what you've got.

With her students, Maria places an emphasis on getting them where they need to be so that they have the skills necessary to attain their goals in life.

Cassandra

You are something special, and you can produce something special. Everybody has a gift.

Principal Nomination

Teaching Practices. Loretta Marshall, the principal at Thomas Elementary School, not only nominated Maria Sanchez, but she also nominated Cassandra Sellers, a kindergarten teacher. The researcher met Ms. Marshall in her office during the month of February. When asked why she nominated Cassandra as being effective with African

American students, she said that "she does a really good job of incorporating best practices into her work." She also reported that when Cassandra implements the TEKS, she incorporates students' interest and relevancy.

High Expectations. Ms. Marshall said that Cassandra holds high expectations for her students and establishes trust with them. With discipline, Ms. Marshall shared the following about Cassandra's classroom:

> She takes care of it right then and there, talking to kids about expectations. There's a visual of what is expected and the consequence to go along with that. That is explained. It's modeled. I don't see her children in the office at all, and she has some in there that have some issues for sure because I know them.

Academic Accountability. According to Ms. Marshall, Cassandra informs students of where they are academically, shares with them where they need to be, and gives them the tools to meet academic goals. Further, with the exception of three students, the majority of Cassandra's students were where they need to be on the TPRI (Texas Reading Proficiency Inventory) in October. Cassandra uses letter identification assessments that are not a part of the district assessment process to assist her as diagnostic tools. Since Thomas Elementary School is a Reading First campus, Ms. Marshall said that the students are "in a very good place" because they are high functioning based on assessment data. Students in kindergarten should reach a level 3 on the DRA by the end of the school year. As indicated in tables 4.3 and 4.4, the average reading scores in Cassandra's class have exceeded the standard as the students were tested during the middle of the year (MOY) and end of the year (EOY) for 2004, 2005, and 2006.

Table 4.3

Average DRA Scores for All Students

All Students	DRA MOY	DRA EOY
2004	2.06	4.32
	(n = 16)	(n = 19)
2005	3.41	6.78
	(n = 17)	(n = 18)
2006	2.59	6.06
	(n = 17)	(n = 17)

Table 4.4

Average DRA Scores for African American Students

African American Students	DRA MOY	DRA EOY
2004	2.33	4.27
	(n = 9)	(n = 11)
2005	3.44	6.94
	(n = 16)	(n = 17)
2006	2.62	5.75
	(n = 8)	(n = 8)

Building Relationships. Ms. Marshall noted that she believes the main role of the school is to make sure that a "wonderful teacher" is in the classroom who is highly qualified and effective with all children, not just African American children. She also holds the belief that these teachers need resources and supportive administrators who hold themselves as well as everyone else on the campus accountable for the learning that the students receive.

With parents, Ms. Marshall indicated that Cassandra believes in communication. When talking about the behavior form that goes home everyday with students, Ms. Marshall reported, “It’s got everything.” The behavior form is not just about how their behavior has been; it is also about their academic performance and anything else that has occurred in that day ranging from what they worked on to how they may have behaved.

When discipline concerns occur in Cassandra’s class, she prefers to handle them in the classroom by working with parents. Ms. Marshall also indicated that Cassandra sends the message that her five-year-olds need to start being responsible and accountable for what they do and see what that looks like. According to Ms. Marshall, “That’s taught and preached and sent home with little notes.” Further, the students who do “lose the happy face or whatever the classroom management system may be” can still find a way to earn it back before the day is out. In Cassandra’s classroom, Ms. Marshall reported, “You may have the worst temper tantrum and lose recess or whatever it may be, but that’s just for that point in time. If you get it back together, then you move your clothes pin or happy face…. It doesn’t decide your whole day. I think it’s not being over punitive.”

Administrative Support. Ms. Marshall declared that she believes Cassandra wants to be at Thomas Elementary School. Teachers can ask for transfers to other schools, yet Cassandra has never asked for one. Even though it is not the “easiest place in the world to be,” she believes that Cassandra still finds it rewarding to see children grow and learn.

Personal Background

Professional Background. The researcher and Cassandra Sellers, a kindergarten teacher, met in Cassandra's classroom during the month of February to conduct the initial interview. Cassandra's classroom was spacious with student work and curriculum objectives lining the walls.

Cassandra described herself as a white woman in her mid 50's. In 1975 Cassandra graduated with a bachelor's degree in elementary education from the undergraduate teacher preparation program at the highly selective public university in Texas that was chosen for this study. Her certification areas include early childhood and kindergarten. In addition to her bachelor's degree in elementary education, Cassandra also has a bachelor's degree in business, a social work endorsement, and a master's degree in curriculum. She obtained her master's degree in curriculum at the same university from which she obtained her bachelor's degree in elementary education.

Cassandra has a total of 18 years in the field of education with 16 years as a teacher and 2 years as an administrator. She taught at a school in which the students were predominantly African American for 7 years prior to leaving the profession for 8 years to be a banker. After 8 years in the banking industry, Cassandra made her entry back into the field of education as a pre-kindergarten teacher in the private sector where she spent 2 years teaching and 2 years serving as the director of the pre-kindergarten program. After 4 years of working with pre-kindergarten students in the private sector, Cassandra came back to Thomas Elementary School where she has been teaching for the past 7 years with 2 years in first grade and 5 years in kindergarten.

The majority of Cassandra's students have been African American for 14 years. Of the 18 students in her class, 67% are African American, and 33% are Hispanic. Cassandra's students all have a low socioeconomic status.

Cultural Background. Cassandra spent her childhood in a "middle-class Anglo American household" with two parents who graduated from college. Her mother was a homemaker during her childhood and did not go back to work until her father passed away. As a young child, Cassandra knew that her parents expected her to go to college because "It was just understood." Cassandra recalled that her life was "pretty easy" as she enjoyed babysitting and being on the drill team prior to graduating from high school.

Unlike the students in her class of predominantly African American students, Cassandra attended public schools that had predominantly white, middle-class students and very few minority students. Cassandra is divorced with two teenage sons from her previous marriage. With schooling experiences similar to Cassandra's, her children have attended public schools in which the majority of the students are white with a socioeconomic status of middle class. Cassandra currently lives in a neighborhood where the majority of the residents are white and from an upper middle-class socioeconomic status.

Perceptions of Culture

To Cassandra culture encompasses "the way people assimilate what's around them in their environment, food, music, language, values, and religion." The notion of cultural differences resonated with Cassandra, for she identified her two teenage sons as biracial because they have an African American father and a white mother. She even

told a story regarding “a little blond-haired girl” who wants to date one of her teenage sons, but the girl’s mother will not allow her to date him. This experience within her family reminds Cassandra that racism still exists. Even with this experience in her mind, Cassandra remarked that she has several minority friends and has chosen to “look at people as people” because they all “have goodness in them.”

Throughout her seven years at Thomas Elementary, Cassandra has seen the population shift from predominantly African American to predominantly Hispanic. The student population consists of 55.4% Hispanic and 43.6% African American. Although Cassandra believes that her students do not see her as a “white, gray-haired lady,” the cultural differences between Cassandra and her students include oral language development and socioeconomic status. According to Cassandra, she has noticed a lack of oral language development with her students since she began teaching. In order to understand what students are trying to relay to her, Cassandra allows them to continue using the speech patterns that she considers undeveloped, correcting them only if certain activities require correct grammar such as when they are writing or reading. She has also encountered parents that are difficult to reach “either because they are working three jobs, don’t have a phone, or just choose not to be available.” Along with an increase in single-parent families, Cassandra has also seen an increase in the number of grandparents with custody of her students instead of their parents.

In Cassandra’s home, her parents made college an expectation, just as Cassandra has with her own children. Further, the parents of Cassandra’s childhood friends held the same expectation of going to college for them. However, Cassandra has noticed that her

students do not seem as motivated about pursuing higher education. She was not sure if this was due to a cultural difference, an economic difference, or an environmental difference.

When thinking about how culture affects the teaching and learning process, Cassandra noted that her students lack experiences that would contribute to their learning: “When we go on field trips and cross the river, they are asking if we are still in Texas. I wonder sometimes really how far they have ventured out from their neighborhood.” To supplement certain field trips that the students cannot attend due to budget constraints, Cassandra displays pictures in the classroom that assist students in relating to certain concepts.

When thinking about how she plans her lessons, Cassandra conveyed that she recognizes students’ culture by revising their reading materials to include names that are similar to theirs and by displaying pictures of children from her students’ races and ethnicities: “We try to have pictures with Latino children, multi-race children, and African American children. We talk about how families can be special no matter who the members are.”

When discussing the problem of African American students’ underachievement, Cassandra contributed the achievement gap to a lack of parenting and exposure. Cassandra holds the belief that students often do what they see their parents or grandparents do, perpetuating a cycle. Cassandra described many of her parents as “babies having babies.” Despite Cassandra’s perspective about students’ home environments, she shared how she views her students:

> They're just my babies. I know how they are demographically viewed, but when I walk in the door, they are my babies. I don't know that I would be doing anything different if I was at another school. I would hope not. They are just kids. It's sad to see the impacts of poverty. It's sad to see kids pulled out in their fourth school, but that's poverty.

Compared to the experiences of her two sons at a school where the students are predominantly white and from middle-class backgrounds, Cassandra has found that there are distinct differences in parental involvement, funding, and support services at her school. The parents at her sons' school lobby for what they think needs to be at the campus, and they contribute donations. Cassandra shared her belief that the difference between the two schools is socioeconomic status.

> I know I've had some fabulous parents that if they weren't working or had the time or money to be available, they would. When you are working two or three jobs and have babies at home with nobody to keep them, it's hard to be available. It breaks my heart when I have a kid with fever, and I can't get a phone that works, or mama won't answer the phone because then she would have to leave work. To me that's economic.

Aside from one incident where a parent threatened her, Cassandra primarily shared positive parent interactions that she has experienced during the current school year. She talked about how she has two or three strong parents that have been "very appreciative" of her role in the parent conferences:

> I've got some really good parents that I talk with here this year. I think they realize what I'm trying to do with their kids. I have one little boy who came in November, and he knew seven letters. He, his mama, and I got to working on the strategy, and now the little baby boy knows all his letters and sounds. He's just figured out what needs to be done. It's 98% of mama being serious about it and grandma, too, at home. He just got right in line. That's just exciting.

Although Cassandra described her class as a "tough crew" with many of the students having emotional needs, Cassandra has found that building relationships with

them has made a difference for their behavior. Further, Cassandra discussed the importance of daily interpersonal interactions and how she gets excited when she makes a connection with a student. She discussed how she enjoys the hugs and the feeling she gets when students come back to see her after they have moved on to first grade.

Cassandra has observed that more students are coming to school with emotional needs, and to her, "It's scary." Not only do their emotional needs affect their academic performance, Cassandra remarked, but their emotional needs also affect the classroom climate:

> It's especially predominant in this crew, and they play off of each other. It makes for a long day a lot of times, but I'm hoping this is not a trend. I'm hoping that I've taught enough that I know every once in a while you get a tough crew, and this is it. Then it makes the angel crew that comes through that much better.

Despite having a "tough crew," Cassandra identified an African American student who is performing well in her class both socially and academically, reading at a first grade reading level.

> She has a very strong extended family and support. She has a single mom, but she's employed. Her grandparents are on the scene, and they are employed. You can tell the child has had discussions about things, has been exposed to different things, and has her opinions valued. A lot of time is given to her. She's well kept, but she's not prissy. She's a kind child. You can tell she's been treated kindly.

Beliefs About Teaching

According to Cassandra, she makes sure that she finds out where her students are academically. Although a part of her job as a teacher is to assist with students' academic needs, Cassandra has noticed that students have emotional needs that affect their academic performance and the classroom climate. With that information, Cassandra

proclaimed, “I get in as much as I can in a day around social work and still do the ABCs, throwing in a lot of hugs and a lot of teacher looks.” Cassandra asserted that responding to her students’ academic and personal needs is a part of her daily routine:

> Break it down into real small chunks and repeat. Let them be kids. Remember they are five and six. Give them a community at school. If they are hungry, we feed them. If they are tired, I let them sleep. You can only do so much.

When thinking about excellence, Cassandra remarked that excellence is “something to strive for, but we’re all works in progress.” Further, Cassandra stated, “I think there are different ways to be excellent. Cassandra identified the most important teachings that she could impress upon her students:

> Take pride in yourself, and that means your work, too. You are something special, and you can produce something special. Everybody has a gift. Value your education; it’s a road to improve your socioeconomic status. This is ugly to say, but not everybody goes to jail. I mean you can do well in this system. Yes, it’s hard, but it will get you somewhere, hopefully. Find something you like to do.

Cassandra shared that she wants her students to do well academically, and she has found that pre-assessments assist her in finding out where students are so that she can know how to best facilitate instruction. Working with parents and mentors has also been helpful in providing extra assistance on difficult concepts. Informing parents that their children need help and giving them ideas on how to help them has shown improvement in students’ progress when parents are available to assist them. Cassandra remarked that kindergarten encompasses a significant amount of repetition and oral language development. Reading to them and doing “the same concepts fifty different ways” has helped her students to be more successful.

A chart is kept in Cassandra's classroom that she believes is a positive aspect in her classroom, even though it focuses on discipline. Behavioral expectations are associated with the chart, and students are rewarded with stickers and the opportunity to pick something from the prize box when they exhibit appropriate behavior. Cassandra observed, "They are working towards something, and it seems to work with this age group." Consequences are given, however, when students behave inappropriately. Cassandra has also observed that many of her African American students speak with louder volumes and require teacher directives that are communicated in a "real stern manner before they believe you really mean it." Cassandra shared that she handles most of the consequences in her classroom by having students not participate in recess when they have inappropriate behavior.

Academic Accountability

Cassandra asserted that assessments are an important way to address her students' needs. However, she later declared, "That's not saying we are successful in meeting everybody's needs, and it breaks your heart." Although the school district provides benchmark assessments at the beginning, middle, and end of the year, Cassandra supplements those assessments by observing their "day to day work, talking to them, listening to their questions, and looking at their faces."

Even though Cassandra noted how she uses assessments to assist her in closing the achievement gap that exists for many African American students, she was reluctant to offer an absolute opinion about standardized testing:

> I understand how people think we need them. I think we are as an industry way over preoccupied with them. I think they take a whole lot of instructional time. The good answer for that is that it's a pain in the neck. I have a child that I know is probably a drug baby. She was born in jail. She came to me in January. She knew one letter. We're up to 21 now, and she's making progress. You don't see her on a standardized test. Forget it. I don't think they show where a child came in and what has been accomplished. They don't allow for that.

Cassandra continued on to share how her students lacked reading materials at home as well as travel experiences. She holds the belief that these factors affect scores on standardized tests because her students' experiences are somewhat limited:

> It's hard for them to be testing on the same measure, yet they can out test some kids on survival skills, common sense, and an ebb and flow. I don't know that standardized tests really reflect the knowledge of these babies.

Teacher Preparation

University Coursework. While in her elementary undergraduate teacher preparation program in the mid 1970's, Cassandra was enrolled in a multicultural course. However, she could not remember any specific content that was covered in the class. When comparing the coursework from her teacher preparation program to the coursework from her master's program in curriculum, Cassandra recalled that the master's program in curriculum exposed her to more effective teaching practices in the early 1980's than the teacher preparation program that she completed in 1975. For instance, she acquired more knowledge about questioning and integrating curriculum across disciplines.

Field Experiences. Recalling the field experiences in her teacher preparation program, Cassandra commented that the university did not have a very diverse population, but her student teaching experience was at a school in which the population

was comprised of predominantly Hispanic students with a slightly smaller percentage of African American students. Aside from student teaching, Cassandra proclaimed that she had no other field experiences with diverse populations in her practicums, which were at a predominantly white school. For Cassandra, her student teaching assignment was a new experience for her because she had never seen how children live in poverty. Further, she discussed how she makes sense of the deficits that students have without instantly placing the blame on the parents: "If you are a crack baby, then I can point to the parent and go, this is your fault. But I have a lot of good parents who are really appreciative and value what we do."

Contributions to Success

Cassandra attributed her effectiveness with African American students to her mentor teacher and administrative support. During her student teaching, Cassandra had a mentor teacher whom she described as "powerful." After becoming a teacher, Cassandra contributed her success with African American students to having "good bosses." According to Cassandra, her current principal described their work at the campus as a "mission." When reflecting upon her first year of teaching, Cassandra recalled inspirational words that her principal said: "If you can teach in a low SES (socioeconomic status), minority school, you can go anywhere." By hearing those words, Cassandra felt as though her principal appreciated what the teachers could contribute to the students at a school in which the student population was 99% African American. From Cassandra's perspective, "It would be a tough, tough place and a tough, tough job if I didn't have the support of an administrator."

Exposure to diverse populations at low-income schools would have been helpful in preparing Cassandra to be more successful with African American students. Cassandra's hope is that teacher preparation programs will assist prospective teachers in getting over their fear of teaching at a low-income school:

> We get a lot of people that come for interviews or say they will come for an interview and then google us on the map and don't even show up. They are not even polite enough to call and say I'm not coming. That's fear. It's a good school. It's a great place to work.

Cassandra maintained that the support staff at her school has been the most beneficial in her effectiveness with African American students. To Cassandra support staff not only includes administrators and mentor teachers, but it also includes other employees on the staff such as teaching assistants, librarians, and custodians. Cassandra declared, "If you've got that, you can muddle through a lot of stuff and get your feet solid." Cassandra was appreciative of the role of Ms. Marshall, the school principal. According to Cassandra, a significant portion of her days at school is spent making sure that students' personal needs are met such as when they need medical attention, food, clothing, or sleep. The principal has made sure that the school has support services such as community organizations, parent specialists, and dinner programs for families. Cassandra asserted, "They've really stepped in and taken a lot of the social work out of the classroom for us."

Reed Elementary School: Rita

Campus Profile

Reed Elementary School is located on the west side of the school district with approximately 516 students. The students represent 31 different languages. The ethnic distribution of the students is as follows: African Americans, 24.4%; Hispanics, 44.0%; Whites, 22.1%; Native Americans, 0.8%; and Asian/Pacific Islanders, 8.7%. Economically Disadvantaged students on free and reduced lunch account for 56.4%, and the school receives Title I funding based on this percentage. Limited English Proficient (LEP) students account for 26.9%. The ethnic distribution of the teachers is as follows: African Americans, 5.4%; Hispanics, 18.9%; and Whites, 75.7%. The average years of teaching experience is 16.3 years.

During the 2005-2006 school year, the school was designated a TEA Recognized rating based on campus performance indicators. Reed Elementary School has received a Recognized rating since the implementation of TAKS in the 2002-2003 school year.

Reed Elementary School is in a neighborhood and is surrounded by a neatly landscaped lawn. The office can be described as immaculately organized and decorated.

A white woman in her mid 40's, Dr. Wanda Lawson, the principal of Reed Elementary School, nominated Rita Davis as an effective teacher of African American students. Dr. Lawson indicated that she has been in the field of education for about 10 years with 6 years as the principal of Reed Elementary School.

Rita

I've been teaching forever. Some of us are born teachers, and some of us become teachers. I was born to be a teacher.

Principal Nomination

Teaching Practices. During the month of February, Dr. Lawson, the principal of Reed Elementary School, met with the researcher in her office to conduct the interview. When thinking about teaching strategies implemented by Rita Davis, a fifth grade language arts and social studies teacher, Dr. Lawson said the following:

> The teaching style she uses isn't different for African Americans than it is from anyone else. It's just that she does quite a bit of group activity where people shine in different areas. They can shine as a group.

High Expectations. Dr. Lawson recalled how Rita incorporates several project-based learning opportunities and holds high expectations for everyone. For Rita, "That is the key. There is no exception to that rule." According to Dr. Lawson, the manner in which Rita disciplines is "very harsh" or "tough:"

> There's not a lot of, really hope you can do this, sweetie. It's sit your butt down and do it. And it's real out there. I mean, as a matter of fact, what people would see, which they probably wouldn't like, is a real harshness. But they know that she loves them beyond a doubt. But she is that way. I'm not going to put up with this. You are going to sit there. You are going to do your work, and you are going to sit there until it's done. You can call your mama; you can call whomever. I'll call your mama for you, but there's not a lot of play, not a lot of sweetness.

Academic Accountability. When discussing why she nominated Rita as being effective with African American students, Dr. Lawson simply remarked, "It's her scores." Dr. Lawson went further to say that Rita's TAKS scores are exemplary in all subjects. With beginning of the year assessment data and middle of the year assessment

data, Dr. Lawson indicated that they have to come a long way. Further, she added, "What you see is a continuation of growth in those tests and her personal teacher driven tests, not district, but teacher driven." To Dr. Lawson, the primary evidence that Rita is effective with African American students is the achievement data associated with her test scores as indicated in tables 4.5 and 4.6 with the percentage of students meeting the passing standard on TAKS in the areas of math, reading, and writing for 2005 and 2006.

Table 4.5

Percentage of Students Passing TAKS

All Students	**Math**	**Reading**	**Writing**
2005	100%	90%	100%
	(n=11)	(n=11)	(n=10)
2006	100%	100%	100%
	(n=11)	(n=11)	(n=11)

Table 4.6

Percentage of African American Students Passing TAKS

African American Students	**Math**	**Reading**	**Writing**
2005	100%	100%	100%
	(n=6)	(n=5)	(n=5)
2006	100%	100%	100%
	(n=4)	(n=4)	(n=4)

Building Relationships. Dr. Lawson discussed how Rita approaches parents differently than some other teachers who have barriers in their communication with parents.

> One of the things that is the hardest for, I think, a lot of middle-class white people to deal with and most teachers that come from middle-class white America or middle-class America, period, is they are scared of the parents more than they are scared of the kids. When an African American parent comes in and is much louder than they are used to, they get fearful. So what they do is, or what I've seen happen is that they go, "I'm not going to mess with them because I don't want to mess with mama."
>
> So that's where an administrator has to come in and go, "You don't have to mess with mama." I will and get it back about the kid. That, to me, is the hardest issue that most teachers have is dealing with low SES kids. But it seems to be more African Americans or the more verbal. They are verbal people. My Hispanic parents typically aren't, so they scare them. They grow up in that world. Then they get faced with another world, and they are scared. It's easier to just let a child slide than to confront a parent and say, "Hey, your kid is failing or your kid is doing this." They will turn it around on you. I think that's a lot of reason why kids fail is because of the parents, not because of the kids.

In her comments about how Rita works with parents, Dr. Lawson responded with the following statements:

> She comes in with data. She knows exactly what she is talking about--about the children. She involves them. She is not afraid of them, of any parent. She comes in telling them what she expects of their child. She works with the parent by going, "I'm assuming what you want for you child is for them to be successful. Well, he's playing a game with you, and he's playing a game with me. Let's both get on the right side and tell him to get it together." She builds that relationship from what do you expect from your child and goes from there.

Administrative Support. When asked about the role of the school in the students' achievement, Dr. Lawson shared the manner in which Rita is supported:

> One of the biggest roles is obviously support. She needs support with discipline. There are not discipline issues in her classroom because of the fact that she needs

> support with discipline, and she needs support with materials. When you are doing project-based materials, that's not always what the district is going to offer you. She also needs an understanding of an administrator. . . . You don't see worksheets, and you don't see this weekly, but you are going to have to look at a different type of grading, more of a criteria of grading so that she can do the type of projects that she does.

At the end of the interview, Dr. Lawson wanted to be sure that the following was understood about the performance of the teachers and students:

> Our school is known for not having gaps. I'm asked all the time why not gaps, so it's not just this teacher. It's an understanding and a belief in children, and it's got to be an understanding and belief that children can be successful regardless of money or the color of their skin, and we determine that.

Personal Background

Professional Background. During the month of March, the researcher met Rita Davis, a fifth grade language arts and social studies teacher, in her classroom to conduct the initial interview. Similar to the school's immaculately decorated office, Rita's classroom was neatly decorated and organized with student work, rubrics, and criteria charts.

Rita identified herself as a Hispanic and Anglo woman in her early 50's. In 1980, Rita graduated with a bachelor of science degree in education from the teacher preparation program at the highly selective public university in Texas selected for this study. In addition to being certified as a master teacher, Rita's certification areas are pre-kindergarten through eighth grade, reading, and ESL (English as a Second Language). Rita is also currently working towards a master's degree in education.

Rita has been teaching for a total of 15 years. She spent 7 years at a campus in which the students were predominantly African American. At that campus, Rita taught

pre-kindergarten for 1 year, first grade for 3 years, a combined first and second grade class for 2 years, and third grade for 3 years. When she left that campus, Rita accepted a teaching position as a fourth and fifth grade teacher at Reed Elementary School where she has been teaching for the past 6 years.

Rita proclaimed that she has always worked with minority students. At her first campus, the majority of her students were African American. According to Rita, Reed Elementary School is a "melting pot," with students from several racial backgrounds represented in her classroom. To Rita's knowledge, her campus is fairly new to Title I funding. Of Rita's 38 students, approximately 80% of them are considered to have a low socioeconomic status by state guidelines because they receive free or reduced lunch.

Cultural Background. With middle class as her socioeconomic status, Rita described her neighborhood as a clean, community-oriented working-class neighborhood. Rita is married and has two children. One of Rita's children is a senior in high school, and the other one is a sophomore in college. Her husband works for the postal service, and her children have attended public schools with diverse populations and socioeconomic backgrounds.

According to Rita, she was raised in the 1960's when being Hispanic and Anglo "was not considered a normal thing to be." Rita identified her mother as an American-born Hispanic and her father as Anglo. Her mother's parents, however, were immigrants who traveled across the United States of America as migrant workers. Rita pronounced that her father's ice business made him the first Hispanic man in the city to own a business in the 1950's.

Rita disclosed that her parents did not teach Rita and her brother Spanish because it "was just not accepted," and it was for their "own protection." Since her father was in the military, Rita did not feel as though being biracial and unable to speak Spanish was a "big deal." Now that they are older, Rita and her brother are learning Spanish. However, Rita acknowledged that she does have a barrier to learning Spanish because it was instilled so deeply in her not to learn it by her parents. Although Rita's parents discouraged her from speaking Spanish, Rita asserted that her family was very loving and supportive. Further, Rita declared, "We never denied our Hispanic heritage, and we were never denied that right. We were just extremely protected."

Perceptions of Culture

Rita described the "melting pot" in her two classes to consist of 30% African American, 30% Hispanic, and 30% White or other. When trying to think about the racial backgrounds of her students, Rita said that it would be difficult to do:

> I would have to stop and actually think about each one of my kids and what their ethnicity is, and I don't do that. I teach children. I don't teach a culture, a color, a sex preference. I teach kids.

From Rita's perspective, culture simply means "who you are." Further, Rita proclaimed, "I deal with prejudice every day, even now. I think that's why I'm so effective as a teacher because it's just not allowed in here." When thinking about her own experiences with discrimination, Rita explained, "That makes me know how I need to be in here to make them be more aware so that they can survive." When thinking about how she approaches culture in the classroom, Rita discussed how she understands

that individual students have cultural differences, but she encourages them to share a group identity:

> When we come into this room, there is not a culture. There is a oneness. We create our own culture, our own standards. That's a little out of the box.

Since 80% of Rita's students are considered to have a low socioeconomic status, she shared that cultural differences exist in the students' "drive" and in the way that they talk to each other. Rita has observed that parents' expectations at home result in a cultural difference. Rita declared, "We're having to change that. We're having to teach that education is extremely important."

Although Rita described her classroom as one in which "there is not a culture," she later clarified that she expects students' individual cultural backgrounds to emerge and serve as a learning opportunity for other students. According to Rita, she does not form opinions about students that are related to their cultural or racial backgrounds. Rita considered learning about other cultures to be "extremely entertaining," for her students have a variety of cultural experiences:

> I think culture is important. I think you are who you are, and you bring that to the table. If you only have an experience of one culture, you are boring. I'm sorry, but you have nothing to offer. We try to hit as many cultures and holidays around the world as we can such as the Chinese New Year, Mardi Gras, and Lent. November and December is a perfect time for that. That's when a lot of them start saying this is what I am. This is what I want to talk about. . . . Food works. Sharing of the food is really what it's all about. I'm trying.

Rita further explained that she does not incorporate students' cultures in isolation. The exposure to cultural backgrounds is interwoven in her lessons because she does not wait for a certain holiday or month to recognize students' cultural backgrounds

in the curriculum. For instance, Rita discussed how she emphasized the Black Buffalo soldiers in one of the students' history lessons.

Rita has observed that there is a difference between the educational experiences of African American students in public schools and the educational experiences of white students in public schools. Further, Rita shared that the perception of the public shapes her students' perceptions of minorities in both positive and negative ways. For instance, Rita thought that having an African American male and a white woman run for president in the same year is quite significant for her students. However, Rita also commented that the news often portrays African Americans and Hispanics negatively because they are more frequently associated with committing a crime or going to jail than Whites. Rita indicated that students need to be aware that all cultures "mess up," but the media gives them an unbalanced perception.

For Rita, building relationships with students and parents assists her in moving her students toward success. Rita and the other fifth grade teachers take their students on a camping trip for three days and two nights in the fall to solidify their relationships with them and to encourage team building:

> We use the camping experience, and we've been pulling it out and building on it since we went. The parents were extremely supportive after they got over the initial, I'm going to have to cut the cord and let them go, and it's been the best thing ever. They come to programs. Not everybody can come, but the majority comes. They know that we are only a phone call away, and they have our email addresses, our home numbers, and our cell numbers. . . . I looked at this as an investment actually.

Rita proclaimed that she seeks 100% support from her students' parents, and difficult interactions are not common for her. Rita remarked, "I think one of the most

important things that you can do is to have support from family . . . so that when you need them, they aren't going to ignore you. They know that you are there for their child." Rita indicated that she believes in calling parents for both positive and negative concerns and has met with them in various settings such as a coffee shop and a baseball game. When Rita acquires parental support, her students know that she will be on the phone calling their parents regarding academic, social, and behavioral concerns. Rita mentioned that she provides support for parents who get involved in helping students with their assignments at home:

> There are a lot of times that our parents aren't on the level that our fifth graders are on. We appreciate them letting us know that and being honest with us, and we support them. We send home extra books and work. They call. It's fine. That's what it's all about. We are all about doing anything that we can to have parents connect with their children and with their education.

Beliefs about Teaching

Since both her mother and grandmother were teachers, Rita declared, "Teaching is in the blood." Rita added, "Some of us are born teachers, and some of us become teachers. I was born to be a teacher." When she was a small child, Rita pretended that she was a teacher with stuffed animals, her relatives, and any one else that she could convince to be her students. For Rita, teaching is a job that is ongoing:

> It's not a 7:30 to 3:30 job. It's as soon as you wake up until you go to bed job. It's not a three months off in the summer job. It's what am I going to do for the following year to continue to get the scores that we've got and to continue the level that we have and go higher. As far as teaching, it's never ending.

Rita affirmed that "every child can be successful." Further, she explained that she does not accept the word "no" or the phrase "I can't" from her students. In order to

make sure that the needs of her students are met, Rita discussed how important it is for both Rita and her students to be able to communicate about what works best not only for their academic needs but also for their personal needs. Rita indicated that her students have to know that she is "invested in them." From Rita's perspective, the most important teachings that she can impress upon her students include being proud of who they are, doing the most that they can for their education, and celebrating who they are. Along with planning lessons that connect to her students' daily lives, Rita shared that providing students with the tools to be successful is one of her daily goals:

> If you give them the tools, they will be successful. Teach them how to use the tools and how to use their strategies. Use those high level vocabulary words every day because if you don't, then you are never pulling them up; you are never expecting more from them. You are teaching the base line, and that's not going to be survivable for them in the future. They have to know what strategy means. They have to internalize and think.

In addition to planning lessons that connect to students' daily lives and providing students with the tools to be successful, Rita discussed how she individualizes instruction or her students:

> A lot of people lump them all together, and I wish that you could do that. It would make our jobs easier, but you really have to individualize instruction as much as possible. Yes, everybody has to do the same work, but how you approach it with a child is very different. It may be with a small guided reading group that you are working in. It may be the social studies project that I assigned and have to work one on one with them.
>
> No one gets out of work. No one gets out of projects. It's how I have to differentiate for that child. You do that and however many number of ways that you have students. I have students who don't have computers and who don't have access to computers. Fine, do what you can do here. I'll help you finish it up.

Since many of her students do not have access to certain experiences that enrich their learning, Rita shared that she provides those experiences for them. For instance, students created habitats and gardens in science in order to assist them in making real-world connections with lesson objectives. In addition, students created their own store in class to reinforce concepts that they learned in math.

Rita maintained that she holds high expectations for all of her students. She declared, "I don't care if you are pink or polka dot, you have to do X, Y and Z to get past me to get to the next grade or to get to the next level, and they do. They rise to that occasion." When discussing how her African American students perform, Rita could not think of one student who was performing below academic standards.

> They are all doing well. They don't have an option. It's the way our classroom is run. Everybody is expected to do homework. Everybody is expected to do projects. Everybody is expected to think out of the box. Everybody is expected to produce. To say that one culture needs more help than others, I don't. It's very difficult to see that or say that.

Instead of focusing on how students of a certain culture or racial background are performing in her class, Rita shared that she focuses on individual students' needs. In order to be certain that the individual needs of her students are met, Rita affirmed that she provides structure for her students, and it works for them just as well as it works for her:

> If they know that while they are at school they are safe, it's structured, and there are expectations from them for their learning, eventually they get it. They have to change. They have to accept it because we are not.

Rita declared that she does not want anything less than excellence from her students. According to Rita, she focuses on setting goals with her students in order to help them achieve excellence:

> Set your goal. If you reach your goal, reset it. Go higher. If you see that your goal is not realistic or that you aren't going to achieve it, then reset your goal and bring it down. It's okay. Whatever goal you set, that's your excellence. That's you. We are all excellent, just at different levels.

Rita indicated that she not only has high expectations for academic performances, but she also has high expectations for student behavior. Rita declared that she believes in discipline, and she involves parents in the process of providing a "comfortable" classroom environment for her students. Further, Rita remarked, "It's not that I'm the law, but you have to have rules in your classroom to be successful." Defining boundaries and setting limits are ways in which Rita explained that she achieves appropriate behavior from her students: "There is a line, and every student knows where that line is. When they cross that line, the first thing they have to deal with is me."

According to Rita, parent conferences and administrative support are sought if students continue to have persistent misconduct. Further, Rita finds out why a student consistently misbehaves and uses that information to devise a plan for success in a positive way. Nevertheless, Rita indicated that she holds her students accountable for their actions, and they receive consequences for inappropriate behavior. Rita discussed how she researches precursors to students' misbehavior such as home environments or their experiences on their bus rides to school. When thinking about her beliefs regarding

discipline with African American students, Rita stated, “It’s not a blue, green, or brown color issue. It’s a class issue.” Rita has observed that the students will monitor themselves and remind others of the classroom expectations.

Academic Accountability

For Rita, academic accountability is important to the success of her students. She was excited that 100% of the African American fifth grade students had passed the reading TAKS. Rita shared that she is so adamant about her students doing well on standardized tests because they will need the experience when they take college entrance examinations. When preparing students for standardized tests, Rita discussed how she reinforces vocabulary development and test-tasking strategies.

Teacher Preparation

University Coursework. When reflecting on how African American students were addressed in her undergraduate university coursework, Rita did not remember a teacher preparation course that identified any content relevant to a single culture prior to her graduation in 1980. She did, however, remember taking an anthropology course that focused on minority studies, but it was not related to education. Rita proclaimed, “Everything that I have learned has come through my own culture and my own experiences.”

Field Experiences. Compared to the university coursework, field experiences were more beneficial for Rita. Rita declared that getting into a classroom and really experiencing the environment will determine whether or not a person is truly a teacher. When Rita was able to observe classrooms, she began “being very aware of the student

as a person and not as a theory." According to Rita, "Theories are great when they work, but practice is really what you need."

Rita had the opportunity to experience student teaching at campuses with diverse student populations on two different occasions, for her reading endorsement and for her general education endorsement. For both endorsements, Rita observed for a semester and taught for a semester. At one campus, the student population was predominantly Hispanic, and at the other one, the majority of the students were African American.

Contributions to Success

Rita attributed her effectiveness with African American students to her unwillingness to "see color." By saying this, Rita indicated that she does not want to form opinions about students' cultural backgrounds and abilities. Further, Rita explained that she is a minority herself, and she believes in changing students' perceptions of themselves. Rita asserted, "They have to accept who they are, and then we move on." When thinking about how she assists them in academic success, Rita declared, "I push. I push. I push. I only have them for a year, and I want them to be where they need to be." She was pleased that she had the opportunity to take students out of the special education program and give them the same TAKS test that the regular education students took.

Rita discussed how her teacher preparation program assisted her with implementing effective teaching strategies. With her endorsement in reading, Rita shared how she can pinpoint what is interfering with a students' progress in reading and devise strategies to help them overcome those challenges.

From Rita's perspective, the administrative leadership in the school is the reason that her school is so successful, for the main objective of the administrative team is "support for the child." Rita remarked that the principal and assistant principal not only emphasize a team effort, but they also believe in the teachers and trust them. Further, Rita proclaimed, "I expect, and I get 100% support from the administration." The role of the administration in the school, Rita declared, is to "provide structure and anything we need to make a child successful." Since she has been teaching, Rita proclaimed that the positive leadership and environment at her campus makes the learning effective:

> Being in a positive environment makes you positive, makes the students positive, and makes the learning effective. The administrators take care of discipline because it's all about academics. It's not about discipline issues or concerns. It's about academics. Every one of these kids can tell you what we are about--academics. That's what you want to brand them with. You can be whatever you want to be as long as you have academics. That's what makes me successful.

Rita shared that her tendency to stray away from the curriculum to provide innovation makes her a teacher who thinks out of the box. Therefore, she relies on the administration to provide her with the funding and with the materials that she needs to expand her lessons. Further, the administrators do "walkthroughs" in the teachers' classroom every day and frequently model lessons for them because they "know curriculum."

Rita described the assistant principal and principal as administrators who always have their doors open. In addition to keeping the lines of communication open with the teachers, Rita described the principal and assistant principal as positive and loving toward the students. When thinking about administrative assistance in acquiring support

from parents, Rita declared, “If we can’t get what we need out of them, then they will definitely try to get it for us.” Rita noted that “there’s a reason why people leave campuses. Administration has a lot to do with that.” Even though the majority of the teachers at Thomas Elementary School are seasoned teachers, Rita proclaimed, “Because of the atmosphere that comes from our leadership, we will continue to give 100% or more.”

Rita attributed the family atmosphere at their campus to the leadership of the administrators:

> We support each other. It’s like a huge family. . . . No we don’t all get along, but don’t cross one of us because the rest of them will be on you. That’s the atmosphere that you want to survive in. That’s why everything is as wonderful as it is, and our scores are as high. The kids are extremely happy because there is not this friction. Kids are receptors. They pick it up. They are happy. Our principal is happy. Our assistant principal is happy. Everybody is happy. Now we are stressed, of course, but we’re happy.

Other components that Rita attributed to her effectiveness with African American students include teamwork, the conscientiousness of having an “A” personality, and professional development. Rita remarked, “I’m always looking for things to read and to entertain myself as well as the kids because you can only get so much before you have to find other things to make it interesting and challenging.” Rita declared that the innovation in her classroom keeps her “coming back into the door because it’s not the money.”

Bolden Elementary School: Constance, Gloria, and Rebecca

Campus Profile

Bolden Elementary School is located on the east side of the school district with approximately 600 students. The ethnic distribution of the students is as follows: African Americans, 30.7%; Hispanics, 65.8%; Whites, 2.7%; and Asian/Pacific Islanders, 0.8%. Economically Disadvantaged students on free and reduced lunch account for 93.2%, and the school receives Title I funding based on this percentage. Limited English Proficient (LEP) students account for 50.3%. The ethnic distribution of the teachers is as follows: African Americans, 16.1%; Hispanics, 34.3%; and Whites, 49.5%. The average years of teaching experience is 10 years.

During the 2005-2006 school year, the school was designated a TEA Academically Acceptable rating based on campus performance indicators. Bolden Elementary School has received an Academically Acceptable rating since the implementation of TAKS in the 2002-2003 school year.

Bolden Elementary School is located in a neighborhood and has a mural painted near the parking lot with the school's alligator mascot portrayed as students in different school settings. The office was spacious and conservatively decorated like the principal's office.

A white woman in her mid 50's, Barbara Lawrence, the principal of Bolden Elementary School, nominated Constance Keller, Gloria Saunders, and Rebecca Gaffney as effective teachers of African American students. Ms. Lawrence has been in education for 27 years and the principal at Bolden Elementary School for 4 years.

Constance

When you are in a diverse classroom, there is just so much you can learn from each other, pulling in your personal experiences every day and relating them to what we are doing in the classroom.

Principal Nomination

Teaching Practices. Ms. Lawrence, the principal of Bolden Elementary School, met with the researcher in her office during the month of February to conduct the interview. When thinking about effective teaching strategies, Ms. Lawrence indicated that Constance Keller, a third grade math and science teacher, is consistent and calm. The students feel as though they have a secure and comfortable environment because Constance does not get "frazzled" when the students are having a bad day. Ms. Lawrence went on further to add that Constance has clear expectations, scaffolding students' learning and addressing their specific needs.

High Expectations. When asked why she nominated Constance as an effective teacher of African American students, Ms. Lawrence stated the following:

> She works really well with all of the kids in being very structured and in having excellent, clear expectations of what she expects their work habits to be. She gives them a lot of scaffolding for them to be able to express their ideas so that when they are trying to do problem solving, they can tell why they were doing what they were doing. They can explain their thinking on problems, and she's really helped them to become much more adept at accountable talk in the classroom.
>
> The kids can actually vocalize what they are thinking. They are not just following a rote pattern. I think her structure and being very calm and consistent across the board helps the kids to feel secure in the classroom so that they can really focus on their academics, and there are not any behavior concerns that come up.

Academic Accountability. Ms. Lawrence indicated that Constance's TAKS results have been really good in math, a subject that she teaches in a departmentalized setting. During the 2005-2006 school year, third graders at Bolden Elementary School had a 50% passing rate overall while Constance's students in her third grade classroom had a 60% passing rate. With BOY assessment data, there were several students who scored below the passing standard. However, by the MOY assessment, several students had made 30 or 40 point gains from the beginning of the year to the middle of the year. As indicated in tables 4.7 and table 4.8, African American students are 6 points below the percentage passing for all students in 2006 for the math TAKS.

Table 4.7

Percentage of All Students Passing TAKS

All Students	**Math**
2006	81%
	(n=16)

Table 4.8

Percentage of African American Students Passing TAKS

African American Students	**Math**
2006	75%
	(n=12)

Building Relationships. Constance builds relationships with the students, and they feel as though they can get assistance with issues that they may be bringing with them to school. They also know that the teacher will help them to be successful academically, no matter what is happening in their lives. With discipline, the manner in which Ms. Lawrence described Constance's classroom management style was similar to her teaching style--consistent and calm.

Ms. Lawrence noted that Constance involves parents, rarely sending students to the office. If Constance sends a student to the office, she walks with the student, talking about the expectations and where "things are breaking down." The biggest behavior problem that Ms. Lawrence can remember is a lack of follow-through on homework at the beginning of the school year. Even though some parents were reluctant to accept the consequences, Constance was very consistent and kept the students after school to accomplish what they had not done for homework previously.

Because of Constance's consistency, the parents began to accept the expectations and consequences, decreasing the amount of homework that was not completed by the students. According to Ms. Lawrence, Constance is open-minded with parents by implementing their suggestions. Further, she is not an adversarial teacher or the kind of teacher who says, "I'm the teacher, and I know better than what a parent may know."

Administrative Support. When discussing the role of the school in the students' achievement, Ms. Lawrence indicated that the administrators assist by providing avenues for them to access help. This includes support with parent conferences, discipline, and school services to assist with student and family needs. Constance is

diligent in seeking out background information about her students that assists her in supporting them in their efforts to be successful.

Ms. Lawrence ended the interview by noting that Constance develops a quality teacher-student relationship that helps the students feel as though they have a "really secure place" to learn and someone who will listen to them and give them the help that they need in order to push them in their academics.

Personal Background

Professional Background. During the month of February, the researcher met with Constance Keller, a third grade math and science teacher, in her classroom at Bolden Elementary School. Constance's classroom was spacious with student desks organized in groups of three and four. Student work lined the hallways along with classroom expectations, rubrics, and criteria charts.

Constance identified herself as a Christian Mexican and white woman in her mid 20's. In 2004 Constance graduated with a bachelor's degree in elementary education from the teacher preparation program at the highly selective public university in Texas that was chosen for this study. Her certification areas are early childhood through fourth grade and general education.

Constance is in her third year of teaching third grade math and science at Bolden Elementary School. Since Constance began teaching three years ago, the majority of her students have been African American. Of Constance's 37 students, approximately 65% are African American, and approximately 32% are Hispanic. Only one white student is

in Constance's class. At least 90% of Constance's students have a low socioeconomic status.

Cultural Background. Although Constance is biracial with a Mexican mother and father who is Polish and English, Constance indicated that she identifies most as Mexican because she was raised within the Mexican culture. Both Constance and her mother were born in the United States of America, but her grandparents were immigrants from Mexico. Constance's parents divorced when she was a very young child. However, her mother remarried and chose the life of a homemaker as she stayed home with Constance's two younger brothers. Constance's biological father works for the city, and her stepfather works for a computer company.

Constance is a single woman and has no children. Although she now lives in a diverse middle-class neighborhood, living "paycheck to paycheck" is what Constance remembered of her socioeconomic status as a child. Constance described the public schools that she attended as "middle of the road" with diverse student populations. Constance was the first person in her family to graduate from college, and her two younger brothers have plans to attend college when they graduate from high school.

Perceptions of Culture

To Constance, "culture is who you identify with, where you come from, what your family believes, and what you believe." Constance noted that an individual's beliefs could be different from the beliefs of that person's family. When thinking about cultural differences, Constance described her Mexican family as having a relaxed lifestyle that is "openly affectionate" and "louder." With the Hispanic students in her

classroom, Constance has noticed a dividing factor in that many of her students are bilingual, speaking both English and Spanish at school with their friends. Because of her biracial heritage, Constance indicated that her students do not view her "in the same way that they view themselves."

Even though Constance shared that her students often do not identify with her cultural background, she felt as though she could relate to some of the challenges that they face, especially since she is a first generation college graduate. Constance discussed how she gives a speech at the end of each year, focusing on how she was the first person in her family to graduate. Further, she talks to them about her financial situation and tells them how she funded her college education with loans so that they know how to access a higher education.

With her African American students who are "usually pretty respectful," Constance has solicited the assistance of a third grade African American teacher who will come in and "lay down the law" when Constance is feeling as though she "can't get through." Constance expressed her perceptions of the way her students view her based on the kind of car she drives and the clothes she wears: "Sometimes they are just like, 'I don't want to listen to this white lady.' But that, like I said, that doesn't happen often. They are usually pretty respectful."

From Constance's perspective, her students' cultural background affects the teaching and learning process. Further, Constance remarked, "When you are in a diverse classroom, there is just so much you can learn from each other, pulling in your personal experiences every day and relating them to what we are doing in the classroom."

Compared to the third grade bilingual class that is quiet, Constance described her class as "noisy and chaotic" but "always pretty under control." In addition, Constance asserted that her louder classroom does not mean that her students are poorly behaved.

When thinking about how she recognizes students' cultural backgrounds in the curriculum, Constance disclosed that "it's kind of tough" to do with math and science; however, she tries to do so in small ways that the students appreciate. For instance, Constance indicated that she changes math word problems to include her students' names, and they enjoy that recognition. In addition, Constance noted that her students often share personal information to include in the math word problems instead of using scenarios that focus on unfamiliar objects such as tugboats, yachts, and station wagons.

Constance asserted that the greatest academic needs of her students are math and reading. When thinking about her own experiences with reading, Constance indicated that she read for fun as a child. She has noticed that reading does not seem fun for her students because many of them are not encouraged to read at home or provided with a quiet place for homework. As a result, her students not only struggle with reading, but they also struggle with math because of the reading that is involved with word problems.

According to Constance, her students' personal needs include learning how to respect each other and the people who support them. In addition to teaching her students to show "common respect for everyone," Constance shared that she wants to teach her students to believe that they are worth something and that they can succeed "despite what they've been told or what they feel." Constance discussed how she tries to teach her students common courtesy and manners. Further, some of Constance's students have

concerns with hygiene and inadequate clothing, but she has observed that those problems are not widespread in her classroom.

When reflecting upon the causes for why public schools have witnessed the underachievement of African American students, Constance asserted that "a lot of it comes from the home situation, even from the day that they were born." At Bolden Elementary School, Constance has noticed that mobility is a concern for many of her African American students. Moreover, Constance has observed that when students move, they "get behind every time they move," and they spend a significant amount of time "playing catch up."

When comparing the educational experiences of African American students in public schools to the experiences of white students in public schools, Constance asserted that there is a difference, especially since the majority of college graduates are white, "and they are the ones who come into teaching." Because of these facts, Constance shared that she believes "it's still hard for these kids to kind of see themselves in the people they are around every day." Constance also showed an awareness of racism and reflected upon how her mother had to endure segregation as a Mexican woman in the 1960's.

Despite Constance's admittance that there is a difference between the educational experiences of African American students and those of white students, Constance was able to reflect upon a particular African American student who is doing well in her classroom. Although this student has "a tumultuous childhood, a parent in and out of prison, and low income," she is just like her mother, a single parent who

"works hard" and has the "most amazing, hopeful personality." Constance shared that she believes that this student "feels important at home." According to Constance, this student has "great grandparents," a mother who attends parent conferences, and a father who called from prison to talk to Constance about his daughter's achievements. Constance indicated that she celebrates this student's achievements at school, and she continues to be successful academically, reading for fun and enjoying learning.

Since Constance believes that her students feel as though she is not like them, she indicated that she finds and shares commonalities between herself and her students in her attempts to have a personal interaction with them everyday. Constance discussed how she pays attention to their interests and important events in their lives in order to show them that she cares about them and that she is listening to them. She also noted that she brings pictures of her dog and her family to share with her students. When students are given the opportunity to learn more about her personal life, Constance remarked, "It really makes them feel like they know me." Moreover, Constance expressed that she does not want students to think that she is there because it is her job. Constance also shared that she brings her mother to the school, and the students enjoy her presence as a "room mom" because they have more of a connection to Constance's life.

When reflecting upon her relationship with parents, Constance indicated that she gets "varying support" from them. Constance was pleased to share positive interactions of parents who have come to meet with her before the first day of school, bringing gifts for the students. Moreover, Constance has observed that "the bottom line with all parents

is that they want what's best for their kid, and they want for their kid to have it easier than they did." Since she has had both positive and negative interactions with parents, Constance remarked that some parents are difficult to reach, and some do not communicate their desires for their children well. Constance declared, "Some parents don't realize that I am on their side and also want what's best."

From Constance's perspective, positive interactions with parents are valuable, and she tries to understand why parents might tend to initiate negative interactions in order to have better communication with them:

> Some of the parents from my class think they don't have time to do all that is asked of them or that they don't have a responsibility to the school, but anytime that we can have a positive interaction, we can start to establish a symbiotic relationship. Some of the parents I work with had bad experiences themselves at school and try to avoid it to their kids' detriment. That same feeling then comes out in the kids, which is sad at third grade. It's difficult to bring a student back from disliking school. I feel that many of my parents are used to putting up a fight for many things in life, and that isn't always necessary. I try to make good phone calls home just as often as bad ones, but anytime I call, the defenses are already up.

Beliefs About Teaching

Constance declared that one of her goals is to "always keep the kids in mind." When she feels overwhelmed with testing and paperwork, Constance remarked that she reminds herself that she is in the classroom to help her students succeed. In Constance's opinion, "Excellence comes in many forms." She shared how she feels as though every one of her students is excellent in some way. Although Constance believes that excellence can come in many forms such as in athletics or theatrics, Constance has

observed that her students "define excellence as academics." As a result, they do not always feel as though they exhibit excellence.

In order to help students succeed, Constance discussed how she runs a "tight ship" both academically and socially to emphasize her high expectations. Constance shared how she emphasizes her expectations for behavior on a daily basis:

> If you are supposed to be quiet in the hallway, then you need to be quiet in the hallway. If you are supposed to walk in a straight line, then you need to walk in a straight line, and there's no way around it. I know that you can run to get to the playground, but our rule says that we need to walk.

Constance noted that she makes sure that the needs of her students are met by "just being on top of things every day." Further, Constance remarked, "I know that sometimes when I'm on their case they feel like it's another woman's voice in their ear, but it's really hard to impress upon them that I'm doing this because I care and because I want them to grow up smart."

For Constance, the manner in which she disciplines students is important in building relationships with them. With her African American students, Constance has observed that her discipline does not need to be "public and embarrassing," for not only should discipline be private, but it should also be "effective and meaningful." Further, consequences should be immediate so that students understand the importance of appropriate behavior.

Academic Accountability

When thinking about pursuing the achievement gap for her students, Constance declared, "I wish there was a magic answer to the achievement gap, but there's not."

Constance disclosed that the "achievement gap is hard to close in a year's span." Further, Constance shared that she implements a variety of strategies to assess students such as daily informal observations and "deep thinking" to help her students believe that they can "succeed in a challenge." When thinking about standardized testing, Constance asserted that standardized testing is not the way to close the achievement gap:

> This whole No Child Left Behind thing is such a hot button issue. When you are in the thick of it, it pretty much feels like instead of No Child Left Behind, let's make the standard whatever we need to in order to get kids where we want them to be. Basically, I feel like standards are being lowered, and when standards are lowered, the standard of what we are supposed to teach is lowered.
>
> It's so hard because we have to produce numbers, and we have to teach what they are supposed to know in order to pass. There is just so much more. You just have to teach them to be thinkers and rise to the challenge. It always feels better when you succeed at something that is challenging. I think they are getting that.

Teacher Preparation

University Coursework. When discussing coursework in the teacher preparation program at the highly selective public university in Texas chosen for this study, Constance shared that she completed a class "based on teaching kids with economic needs or cultural differences" prior to her graduation in 2004. Constance recalled how classes that focused on certain elementary core subjects exposed her to cultural differences. In addition, Constance remembered relating to a book that she had to read about a white teacher who had difficulty connecting with the students. Although Constance could not remember much about what she "learned in the books," she felt as though "tolerance and acceptance" were character traits that many of her classes

reinforced in order to convey to prospective teachers that they had to "deal with it and move on."

Field Experiences. Constance recalled that diversity was present in all of the field experiences she acquired as a part of her teacher preparation program. Both her practicums and her one semester of student teaching were completed on campuses that had predominantly Hispanic students, and the rest of the students were African American:

> I remember the biggest issue for me was students who had parents in prison and students who had been abandoned by both parents and were being raised by their grandparents. In my practicum that was the first time that I had dealt with that, which was just such a foreign thing to me. I knew it happened all the time, but personally, I had never dealt with that. For me it was heart wrenching. For these kids I'm sure it's heart wrenching as well, but they come to school every day and just deal with it.

Contributions to Success

When reflecting upon her three years as a teacher, Constance attributed her effectiveness with African American students to her parents raising her to respect everyone, going to diverse schools, and having diverse friends. As a research assistant in college, Constance also had the opportunity to participate in training that focused on various cultural backgrounds.

Constance felt as though "exposure to recent literature about teaching African American students" would have been more helpful in her teacher preparation program:

> I feel like something from an African American viewpoint would also be really helpful instead of just from someone else writing a book and talking about how it was so different. Reading a book from an African American standpoint

> that gives perspectives such as this is what is going on, this is what this means, this is how you should act, and this is what you should not react to would also be helpful.

According to Constance, Bolden Elementary School makes "an earnest effort to make a big deal about success." In addition, the administrators give students opportunities to explore what they want to do in the future. For instance, the campus provides information about careers and funding to visit a local public university from which Constance obtained her bachelor's degree.

Although Constance disclosed that she is still refining her role as a professional by being persistent in finding the right words to say to parents, she shared that seeing every child as an individual has helped her to become more effective with African American students.

Gloria

I believe that everybody is able to learn and deserves an equal, fair education and access to that.

Principal Nomination

Teaching Practices. During the month of February, Ms. Lawrence, the principal of Bolden Elementary School, met with the researcher to conduct the interview. Ms. Lawrence nominated Gloria Saunders, a special education teacher for kindergarten through fourth grade, as an effective teacher of African American students because Gloria has really "done an excellent job of helping students develop their reading skill. Some of the kiddos that she had last year were particularly brought to her class so she could implement a structured phonics-based program that made great gains."

High Expectations. Ms. Lawrence discussed how Gloria engages in scaffolding and holds high expectations to help students make significant progress in her classroom:

> She taught second grade last year, and a lot of them are starting still like level three and four on the DRA. They have made significant gains, and we definitely feel like they will pass TAKS on this first try. They made huge progress with her reading things that she did for them last year.
>
> Then she also is really good about analyzing what the students' problems are and working with the support staff to make sure they get the support that they need. I think that's kind of why she decided she would move into being a support staff person with special education because she saw the need for that coordination between the regular and special education. Now she's it from the other side, and she's done a good job of working with the kids and getting them as close to grade level as possible.

Academic Accountability. Citing DRA data, Ms. Lawrence shared an example of how Gloria assisted second grade students in making progress in reading the previous school year:

> She had that group of kiddos that started very low on their DRA's, and just about everybody was on grade level or within two or three DRA levels of being on grade level when they left her room. They started at 3's and 4's, and by the time she was done, I think everybody was at least 18's, 20's and 24's.

According to DRA standards, students in first grade should reach a level 16, and students in second grade should reach a level 30 on the DRA by the end of the school year. Although Gloria's average scores on the first and second grade did not meet the DRA standards, the students showed significant growth. Students in first grade should enter with a level 3, and students in second grade should enter with a level 16. The average scores for students entering first and second grade indicate that the students entered with scores below grade level. As indicated in tables 4.9, 4.10, 4.11, and 4.12, the average reading scores in Gloria's classes have improved as the students were tested

at the beginning of the year (BOY), middle of the year (MOY), and end of the year (EOY) for 2004, 2005, and 2006.

Table 4.9

First Grade Average DRA Scores for All Students

All Students	**DRA BOY**	**DRA MOY**	**DRA EOY**
2004	2.80	7.80	14.75
	(n = 15)	(n = 15)	(n = 16)
2005	2.83	9.28	15.28
	(n = 18)	(n = 18)	(n = 18)

Table 4.10

First Grade Average DRA Scores for African Americans

African American Students	**DRA BOY**	**DRA MOY**	**DRA EOY**
2004	3.00	8.27	15.27
	(n = 11)	(n = 11)	(n = 11)
2005	3.44	12.22	18.22
	(n = 9)	(n = 9)	(n = 9)

Table 4.11

Second Grade Average DRA Scores for All Students

All Students	DRA BOY	DRA MOY	DRA EOY
2006	10.15	18.46	20.53
	(n = 13)	(n = 13)	(n = 15)

Table 4.12

Second Grade Average DRA Scores for African American Students

African American Students	DRA BOY	DRA MOY	DRA EOY
2006	14.60	21.20	19.71
	(n = 5)	(n = 5)	(n = 7)

Building Relationships. Regarding the manner in which Gloria handled discipline, Ms. Lawrence made the following comments:

> She also did a really good job of, if a student was having some social type problems or behavior type problems, working with the parents. I've seen her grow because she's been here with us for most of her teaching career. I've seen her grow in her ability to work with the parents, and when at first they may have some questions about the way she's working with their kids, she works through that with them.
>
> In her first year. . . . some of the African American parents were a little worried that she was too easy on the kids and that she let them get by with too many things. She really would sit down and talk with the parents and problem solve together, and she changed a little bit of her style to meet the kids' style, which I think made her much more effective. By the end of the year, the parents were just like they are partners with her and felt what she was doing really benefited their kids.

Ms. Lawrence further commended Gloria for building relationships with both parents and students and for being calm and consistent in her demeanor while doing so. According to Ms. Lawrence, "It's always a partnership situation."

Administrative Support. When reflecting upon how the school contributes to students' achievement, Ms. Lawrence said that the school administrators assist by making sure that access to support staff and services is available. This includes administrative support with parent conferences and discipline.

Personal Background

Professional Background. When the researcher and Gloria Saunders, a special education teacher for kindergarten through fourth grade, met in the library during the month of March, she identified herself as a single white woman in her late 20's. In 2001 Gloria completed the undergraduate elementary teacher preparation program at the highly selective public university chosen for this study. Her certification areas include interdisciplinary studies, kindergarten through eighth grade, and special education. Gloria also has a bachelor's degree in psychology. She is currently taking hours toward a master's degree in library sciences.

Gloria has taught on two campuses, and the majority of her students have always been African American with a low socioeconomic status. For the past six years, Gloria has had a number of teaching experiences. For instance, she has taught first grade for three years, second grade for two years, and special education for one year. Although Gloria is a special education teacher for kindergarten through fourth grade, Gloria currently works part-time as a librarian at the campus.

Cultural Background. Gloria described herself as a white woman who came from a white, Protestant family with multiple cultures in her family background. Her mother is Catholic, and her stepfather is Jewish. As a child, Gloria's socioeconomic status was middle class. Although her biological father was very poor and worked in cotton fields, her stepfather is a salesman, and her mother is a secretary in a doctor's office.

Perceptions of Culture

From Gloria's perspective, cultural differences include factors such as ethnicity, religion, socioeconomic status, belief systems, morals, commonalities, and lifestyle. Gloria shared that cultural differences exist between her students and herself. Although Gloria differs from her students in racial background and socioeconomic status, she lives "very close" to the neighborhood in which her students live. In Gloria's classroom, the majority of the students that she serves in her special education classroom are African American; however, she does serve some Hispanic students in her classroom. Having a low socioeconomic status is a commonality that exists for all of Gloria's students, and many of them have a single parent. When thinking about her need to understand students and their backgrounds, Gloria noted the importance of recognizing students' culture through the daily interpersonal interactions that she has with her students on an individual basis:

> The most important way to reach children is to develop an interpersonal connection with them. I'm pretty well-knit into the community here. I go to volleyball games. I go to basketball games. I go to my kids' soccer games. I go to parties that parents throw. I think it's really important to try to immerse yourself in the community in which you work.

Gloria indicated that as she learns more about her students and their cultural backgrounds, she selects books that "reflect a wide variety of different types of kids and children from different areas of the world." Further, Gloria commented that she tries to implement reading selections that show her students the cultural backgrounds of "different types of people because that's the world we live in." In order to be successful with African American students, Gloria has found that relating her lessons to their daily lives and incorporating books written by African American authors assist in promoting their culture.

In reference to the manner in which culture affects teaching and learning, Gloria remarked, "Everybody brings his or her own belief system into learning and teaching, no matter if it's conscious or not." With that belief in mind, Gloria indicated that she does not "see color," for she identifies "needs and strengths before anything else." Even though many of her students have a single parent or working parents, Gloria indicated that she attempts to have daily communication with parents through methods such as homework folders, academic progress reports, or behavioral updates.

With her students' academic needs, Gloria shared that she provides "extra support and encouragement." Further, Gloria remarked that she has to compensate for what the majority of her students lack at home on an individual basis. For instance, Gloria discussed how she often sends books home with students to practice their reading because many of them do not have books at home.

With African American students, Gloria asserted that she does not attribute any instances of underachievement to their ethnicity, for she believes that

"underachievement with children really relates to socioeconomic class." Moreover, Gloria declared that the public schools that serve predominantly white students are often different than public schools that serve predominantly African American students because of issues that go "very deep in our society and relates back to politics." Gloria asserted that public schools with predominantly African American students often lack resources, funding, and people who care. Gloria suspected that there might be a "conspiracy theory" among those who "want to keep things the way they are for a purpose."

Although Gloria has observed the differences between public schools that serve predominantly white students and those that serve predominantly African American students, she reflected about one of her second grade African American students who had an "excellent" year. After Gloria nominated him for the gifted and talented program, she was not surprised that he qualified because he was self-motivated, sought knowledge on his own, and "thought outside of the box." Even though the student's mother worked as a hair stylist and his father was in the military, Gloria recalled how his mother and father were always involved with the school. For instance, his mother came to the school daily to help Gloria in the classroom, ate lunch with him often, and attended parent conferences. Since the student was from a middle-class background, Gloria was unsure if his socioeconomic status was influential in his success.

When thinking about how she fosters relationships, Gloria indicated that she seeks to establish trust and respect with her students and their parents. She discussed how she identifies similarities with her students and shares them with them on a regular

basis. Gloria conveyed that she has had more positive interactions with her students' parents than negative. The only negative interaction that was vivid to Gloria involved a parent who was upset that her child brought home another student's crayons. Gloria indicated that parents tend to regard her as a "young, white teacher" on their first interaction with her. According to Gloria, relating to the parent and choosing not to be defensive is what helped her turn a negative conversation into one that initiated a rapport with the parent.

Beliefs About Teaching

When reflecting upon her beliefs about teaching, Gloria declared, "I believe that everybody is able to learn and deserves an equal, fair education and access to that." From Gloria's perspective, she believes that the most important teachings she can impress upon her students are perseverance, respect, and how to be a self-motivated learner. In addition, Gloria asserted that the expectations are the same for all of her students. Further, she shared that "excellence is a combination of effort, perseverance and willingness to learn." For instance, with discipline matters, Gloria indicated that she practices consistency and enforces consequences for students' actions. Gloria also observed that many of her students respond well to "very stern loud voices" because that is what they experience at home.

Although Gloria expressed that teachers should respond appropriately to students' individual needs, she also declared, "Students should be held to the same standards across the board." Gloria indicated that knowing and understanding that

standards exist prevents some students from being misidentified with learning disabilities in special education.

Academic Accountability

To meet the academic needs of her students, Gloria expressed that she makes sure that what she is teaching is reflected in their work. To assess students, Gloria implements observational notes, weekly tests, quarterly tests, benchmarks, and assessments that are required by the district such as TPRI and DRA.

Although Gloria conveyed that she believes standardized testing solicits "teaching toward the test," she also asserted that she works to provide students with a "level playing field so that all of them can have a fair chance at the TAKS." In addition, Gloria relayed that standardized testing prompts the teaching of concepts that teachers normally would not teach unless required to do so. Further, Gloria has observed that standardized testing "pushes teachers and schools to teach everybody." However, Gloria noted that "the student learner suffers because a lot of the teachers do just teach to the test." Conversely, Gloria has found that the "test is unfair because it doesn't take into account that some students don't have the background experience that other students have."

Teacher Preparation

University Coursework. While reflecting upon the teacher preparation program at the highly selective public university in Texas, Gloria recalled that she completed one class called Socioeconomic Influences on Learning prior to her graduation in 2001. Further, Gloria declared, "The one thing I took away from that class is I was always

somewhat afraid to discuss and bring up differences, but that class forced me to see that it's actually good to bring up differences among us because that's what makes us who we are." Gloria also remembered that the instructor of the course focused on "how culture impacts learning and good strategies to use with diverse students."

When she read Kozol's (1991) *Savage Inequalities* as a course requirement, Gloria declared that the book only confirmed what she believed about the disheartening plight of poor minority students in America's public schools. The one strategy that Gloria remembered to use with diverse students involved a list of books that recognized students' cultural backgrounds. Gloria disclosed that her "first year was a disaster" because she had not internalized much of the content that the instructors presented.

Field Experiences. During the field experiences in her teacher preparation program, Gloria was exposed to diverse student populations through volunteer opportunities, practicums, and student teaching. She had the opportunity to work with Hispanic and African American students, and the majority of the students had a low socioeconomic status. Gloria's student teaching assignment consisted of one semester of observation and one semester of teaching.

Contributions to Success

When reflecting upon why she is successful with African American students, Gloria proclaimed, "I don't see color." Further, she expressed that she identifies students' "needs and strengths before anything else:"

> I think all students are the same when they walk in my room. I treat them the same way that I would treat anybody else. People are people. I am here to do my job to teach them, to nurture them, and to identify any problems that they have. I

> just see them as someone who needs to learn. I wouldn't teach them any differently. I just look at needs first and foremost, and maybe those needs are directly or indirectly related to the culture.

Although Gloria shared that she addresses individual needs, she also indicated that some of her students' academic needs could be related to their cultural backgrounds. With language development, for instance, Gloria indicated that she models standard English. She also conveyed that she tries to be more sensitive to how students' cultural backgrounds influence how they react to situations, how they speak, and how they behave.

When thinking about the role of the school in the students' achievement, Gloria simply commented, "It is everything." From Gloria's perspective, the administration, along with the other staff members, are responsible for making the school a place in which students can "feel safe" while they are learning, making friends, and building character.

In addition to the "firsthand experience" of her student teaching assignment, Gloria's experiences as a teacher have helped her to be more successful. Aside from her practice of identifying individual students' needs without seeing color, Gloria relayed that she focuses on connecting with the community and building relationships with her students and their parents.

Rebecca

I just have always thought that if you are comfortable around the kids, then they are going to be comfortable around you.

Principal Nomination

Teaching Practices. Ms. Lawrence, the principal of Bolden Elementary School, met with the researcher in her office during the month of March to conduct the interview. When thinking about effective teaching strategies, Ms. Lawrence indicated that Rebecca Gaffney, a reading specialist for third through fifth grade, "is very explicit in helping kids to understand what it is that they need to do." More specifically, Ms. Lawrence discussed how Rebecca has developed visuals for the students to assist with recalling information when analyzing text. As a reading specialist, Rebecca serves as a resource for instructional strategies and materials. In addition, she meets with small groups of students throughout the school day who need assistance with their reading. Ms. Lawrence has given Rebecca the honor of not only being nominated as an effective teacher of African American students but also being called the campus' "reading guru."

According to Ms. Lawrence, Rebecca is "very highly respected by the whole faculty as being an expert in the area of reading." Further, Ms. Lawrence declared, "She's also an expert in being able to present information both to adults and to kids." Ms. Lawrence has observed that the teachers often seek guidance from Rebecca regarding students who are having difficulty reading.

High Expectations. Ms. Lawrence conveyed that Rebecca emphasizes to students that the assistance she provides will help them become better readers. Since certain

students leave their regular classrooms to visit Rebecca for reading instruction, Ms. Lawrence expressed that Rebecca tries to "help them feel really successful about coming to her class." According to Ms. Lawrence, Rebecca strives to protect students' self-esteem by designing lessons that make students "want to come" to her classroom, even though they know they are getting extra reading assistance that other students do not need.

Academic Accountability. Ms. Lawrence declared that Rebecca's students have made "tremendous gains." Since Rebecca is very analytical with assessment data, Ms. Lawrence discussed how Rebecca has been the person who disaggregates the practice TAKS data so that the teachers know what kinds of questions were difficult for the students and the exact objectives that students answered incorrectly on the test. Ms. Lawrence indicated that Rebecca also "does a really good job of talking to the kids about where they are with their TAKS practice, how much they've improved, what areas have shown improvement, and what skills areas still need improvement."

Building Relationships. When thinking about Rebecca's rapport with parents and students, Ms. Lawrence remarked, "She does a really good job of making connections with the kids, building relationships, and letting the kids know that she truly cares about them." In order to foster positive relationships with parents, Rebecca facilitates workshops on family reading nights. With discipline concerns, "She tries to use a positive approach, so if there is any kind of difficulty that comes up or correction that she needs to give them, they know that she cares about them and wants what is best for them." If Rebecca needs to involve parents with academic or behavioral concerns, Ms.

Lawrence shared that Rebecca will not hesitate to call them and schedule meetings with them in order to share strategies.

Administrative Support. In order to support Rebecca's role as a reading specialist, Ms. Lawrence indicated that she makes certain that the student's classes are scheduled in a way that will allow Rebecca the time that she needs to meet with them in small groups. For instance, Ms. Lawrence arranges the students' classes so that they can visit with Rebecca in the morning since that time of day is more conducive to learning. In addition, the campus administrators follow up on instructional matters that the reading specialist asks them to monitor in the classrooms.

Personal Background

Professional Background. The researcher met with Rebecca Gaffney, a reading specialist for third through fifth grade, in the library during the month of April to conduct the interview. Rebecca identified herself as a middle-class, Protestant, white woman in her mid 50's. In 1976 Rebecca graduated with a bachelor's degree in special education from the teacher preparation program at the highly selective public university in Texas that was chosen for this study. Rebecca also has a master's degree in reading. In addition, she is certified as a master reading teacher, and she is certified to serve as an administrator.

With 30 years of educational experience, Rebecca has held teaching positions on 3 different campuses with diverse student populations that consisted of both Hispanic and African American students. Rebecca has taught first through sixth grade in her 30 years of experience, and she was an assistant principal for 6 years at her current campus.

Five years of Rebecca's educational experience has been spent as a reading specialist at Bolden Elementary School. Since her small reading groups of students are subject to change each week according to student needs, Rebecca noted that approximately 70% of her students are African American, and approximately 40% of her students are Hispanic. In addition, the majority of her students have a low socioeconomic status.

Cultural Background. Rebecca described her cultural background as one of mixed heritage that consists of "Caucasian, Irish, and a little American Indian." Rebecca grew up in a large urban city in Texas with a middle-class socioeconomic status. While in her senior year in high school, Rebecca witnessed the end of segregation in her school with all white students as African American teachers were transferred to the school and African American students were bussed.

Unlike the neighborhood in which her students live, Rebecca lives in a middle-class neighborhood. Although predominantly white residents live in Rebecca's neighborhood, African American and Hispanic residents live in her neighborhood as well. Rebecca is divorced, but she has two daughters from her previous marriage who are in college. Before going to college, Rebecca's children attended public schools with predominantly white students and smaller percentages of Asian, African American, and Hispanic students.

Perceptions of Culture

From Rebecca's perspective, culture includes family background, tradition, religion, and an individual's beliefs about his or her own background. Rebecca asserted that some of her students' academic concerns are a result of poverty instead of cultural

background. However, Rebecca also noted that her students' challenges with language development could be due to a cultural barrier.

Rebecca shared that she is aware of the cultural differences that exist between her students and herself. The main cultural differences that Rebecca has observed consist of economic factors and her students' lack of an aspiration to attend college. Rebecca grew up knowing that college was in her future, but she has noticed that her students who live in poverty often do not have college as a future goal. Further, Rebecca declared, "I'm not sure that they look beyond this year to see what is going to happen next because they are probably worried about what is going to happen in their lives--period." Another cultural difference that exists between Rebecca and her students involves the bilingual skills that her Hispanic students possess because they already know two languages.

In order to understand how culture affects the teaching and learning process, Rebecca proclaimed that teachers have to understand students' family background. She also noted that students' families are "blended," indicating that they often have non-traditional families. In addition, Rebecca expressed that she involves parents in educational decisions as much as possible so that they can understand students' challenges with reading and be informed about the interventions she recommends.

When thinking about academic performance, Rebecca indicated that her students' greatest academic needs involve the classroom environment. According to Rebecca, the students need structure, consistency, an inviting classroom, and a nurturing

teacher with a sense of humor. In addition, Rebecca relayed that teachers need to make personal connections with students in order to help them be successful:

> Teachers should be able to make a connection with students personally so that when push comes to shove and they are ready to give up because of whatever has happened at home, they have a connection with the teacher who is helping them hang on and go forth in their lives. Their personal needs could involve being homeless, not having anything to eat last night, coming late to school because mom couldn't get up or didn't have an alarm clock, and arriving late to school without eating breakfast because there is nobody at home. I can't even believe the children are even attentive in class, but they are. I think it goes back to making that connection, and they know that you care.

With her African American students, Rebecca attributed their challenges with overcoming underachievement to the high mobility rate of the children in poverty at her school. Rebecca declared that having to adjust after frequent moves to new schools and surroundings "would be hard on anybody." Rebecca has observed that not only do poor students with high mobility lack language development and experiences that would enrich their learning, but also those students who have been at the campus for two or three years experience some of the same concerns with academic performance.

In her 30 years of teaching experience, Rebecca has observed that the educational experiences of white students in public schools differ from the experiences of African American students in poverty who attend public schools. Rebecca shared her concern that some alternative certification programs are certifying inexperienced teachers who have never observed diverse students in poverty:

> Children from backgrounds that have not had a good experience need your most experienced teachers. I'm not saying that every experienced teacher is great. I'm not saying that, and there are some very good inexperienced teachers that are great. We need good experienced teachers who can move the kids on when they are already behind.

Although Rebecca typically works with students who have difficulty reading, she was able to reflect upon a student who is doing well because he recognizes "strong teaching." Rebecca indicated that the student responds to consistency. According to Rebecca, making a connection with him has helped him to build his confidence with reading. Even when the student is tired, Rebecca has observed his attentiveness. Although Rebecca does not know his family well, she asserted that the student has the ability to "want to do well." Rebecca indicated that she has seen a "spark" in him that makes her "want to do well for him."

Making personal connections is how Rebecca described her approach to building relationships. According to Rebecca, the majority of her interactions with parents have been positive in her role as a teacher as a result of the connections that she makes with the students in her classroom. With students, Rebecca conveyed that she takes the time to identify similarities with her students, and she shares those similarities with students as one way to initiate daily personal interactions with them. Rebecca proclaimed, "I just have always thought that if you are comfortable around the kids, then they are going to be comfortable around you."

Beliefs About Teaching

Rebecca shared that the most important teachings she can impress upon her students are believing in themselves, having high expectations, and aspiring to go to college. When Rebecca discusses the TAKS test with her students, she compares it with college entrance exams and tells them that they are already preparing for college by

taking TAKS. Rebecca expressed her desire to show her students that she cares about them and that she is not going to "slack off." Further, Rebecca conveyed that she is consistent in wanting the "best for them."

In Rebecca's opinion, effective teaching strategies in her classroom consist of referring to visuals that students can use to make connections with reading selections. Moreover, Rebecca declared, "If you want them to know it, then you need to teach it." For Rebecca, this includes very specific procedures, routines, and expectations that are taught in a direct manner. Using questioning techniques has helped Rebecca to assess what students understand and how well they are able to think on a higher level.

In order to make sure that the needs of her students are met, Rebecca shared that the easiest way is by assessment, understanding that a student's body language can reveal whether or not lesson objectives are understood. When she gives assessments, Rebecca declared that her job is to find out why a student did not do well and to find a different way to teach the content or skill.

Although Rebecca wants her students to do well academically, she expressed that there are many definitions of excellence. For instance, Rebecca remarked that a student could be excellent in sports. Further, Rebecca indicated that her main definition of excellence involves being well rounded. In order for students to be well-rounded, Rebecca conveyed that schools need to be well-rounded and have "strong teaching."

While pondering how she assists her students in attaining successful outcomes, Rebecca expressed that she holds high expectations for her students, "even though they have things going on in their lives." Rebecca declared, "We're all going to do it."

With discipline, Rebecca shared that she holds high expectations as well. She discussed how she is consistent and fair with all of her students. Further, she explains rationales for rules and consequences and uses questioning to solicit students' reflections about their actions.

Academic Accountability

Noting that the majority of the students at her campus live in poverty, Rebecca has observed that students of affluent backgrounds in other schools throughout the school district typically enter pre-kindergarten with significant educational experiences unlike the students in her school. According to Rebecca, many of the students in her school have to play "double catch up," but some students do not "catch up," causing the achievement gap to persist.

In order to assess her students' academic needs, Rebecca indicated that she uses multiple assessments and realizes that there is "life beyond TAKS." For instance, Rebecca has found that not all third grade students who have passed the reading portion of TAKS are proficient readers. Rebecca commented that the TAKS test is only one way to see how students are progressing. With an emphasis on the development of social skills, using several different assessments and classroom observations to obtain a "well-rounded picture" of a student's abilities are strategies that Rebecca suggested as aids in closing the achievement gap.

Teacher Preparation

University Coursework. When thinking about the coursework in her undergraduate elementary teacher preparation program at the highly selective public

university in Texas chosen for this study, Rebecca recalled that there were not any classes within the program that focused on diverse student populations prior to her graduation in 1976. However, she did remember having the choice to take electives that focused on ethnicity within other departments outside of education, but these elective courses were not required. Rebecca indicated that many of her required courses were focused on theory, and she felt as though the courses did not have a sufficient focus on practice.

Field Experiences. During her field experiences within the teacher preparation program, Rebecca was exposed to diverse student populations. However, the majority of her student teaching assignment was spent at a predominantly white school. During the first semester of her student teaching assignment, Rebecca observed at a campus with predominantly Hispanic students. The second semester of her student teaching assignment was split between a short period at a campus with predominantly Hispanic students and a school in which the majority of the students were white. At the school with a predominantly white population, Rebecca recalled that only two students had reading difficulties, and she was surprised to find they were only half a grade level behind in their reading.

In her first teaching position, Rebecca was a special education teacher, and she noticed that the many of the minority students were in her classes and unable to read in the sixth grade. Since she had not learned how to assist these students effectively, Rebecca disclosed that she “didn’t help them much that year.”

Contributions to Success

When pondering why she is effective with African American students, Rebecca noted that having small groups of students assist in making connections with individual students. Further, Rebecca expressed that the students "feel comfortable" because they know that their experiences are going to be "fun." Rebecca conveyed that she discusses with the students how she collaborates with their home teachers in a team as they work together to define expectations for the students and to devise ways to help them be successful.

From Rebecca's perspective, the campus administration must play a role in the students' achievement by providing an "inviting and nurturing environment" as soon as they enter the campus. Rebecca noted that even the cafeteria needs to be a "comfortable" place because the students eat their meals there. According to Rebecca, if the students want to be at school, then "half the battle is over."

With her teacher preparation experience, Rebecca noted that the most effective components were her field experiences and the theories that she learned:

> I think it would be important to look at different schools, not just be placed in one school and be done with it. I don't think that's the best preparation. I think the university gives you a really broad look at different philosophies, depending on the professor that you get. It gives you a really broad look at things. I can't say it was all very practical. I really can't say that. That would be a good thing. I don't know that some of the classes are all that practical.
>
> I think overall I was well prepared because the university sets high expectations for you, and when I got out, whether I had been this way or not, I was ready to do extra work or put in the time needed to do what you needed to do because you did work hard through the university. There is no doubt. You had to put in your time. You can't just float through it. I think that probably helped me with the self-discipline and stuff like that.

When reflecting upon what would have been more helpful in preparing her to be successful with African American students, Rebecca indicated that she would have liked more classes that were specifically focused on students with learning disabilities and what to do when the students cannot read or write:

> Don't show me this is why they can't do it. Okay, that's great. All of that is great to know. I want to know what has worked or what might work. Give me some armor to go into the classroom with. Don't just tell me these are all the theory bases. I want to know. . . . a really proven strategy.

Meeting different kinds of students that come from different kinds of families is what Rebecca has found to help her be more successful with African American students. In addition, Rebecca shared that her experience and her commitment to keeping high expectations for her students has contributed to her effectiveness.

Spencer Elementary School: Jennifer and Evette

Campus Profile

Spencer Elementary School is located on the east side of the school district with approximately 283 students. The ethnic distribution of the students is as follows: African Americans, 36.7%; Hispanics, 61.1%; and Whites, 2.1%. Economically Disadvantaged students on free and reduced lunch account for 98.9%, and the school receives Title I funding based on this percentage. Limited English Proficient (LEP) students account for 18.7%. The ethnic distribution of the teachers is as follows: African Americans, 18.0%; Hispanics, 28.9%; and Whites, 53.1%. The average years of teaching experience is 11.1 years.

During the 2005-2006 school year, the school was designated a TEA Academically Acceptable rating based on campus performance indicators. Spencer Elementary School has received an Academically Acceptable rating since the implementation of TAKS in the 2002-2003 school year.

Located near a highly traveled road, Spencer Elementary School is within a few blocks of a low-income government housing complex. The outside of the school and portable buildings were lined with inspirational banners. The office area was conservatively decorated like the rest of the school.

An African American woman in her mid 30's, Wanda Malone, the principal of Spencer Elementary School, nominated Jennifer Mason and Evette Tate as effective teachers of African American students. Wanda Malone indicated that she has been in education for 16 years and is currently in her first year as a principal.

Jennifer

I really do believe that all children can learn if they are taught in the way that they need to learn. It's not the same for all children.

Principal Nomination

Teaching Practices. Ms. Malone traveled to meet the researcher in her office during the month of February to conduct the interview. As a reading specialist, Jennifer serves as a support staff member who acts a resource for teachers while also serving a number of students across the campus in various grade levels. When asked why she nominated Jennifer Mason, a reading specialist for kindergarten through fifth grade, as

an effective teacher of African American students, she responded by making references to Jennifer's various experiences with all groups of children:

> She has the professional training to work with students who are needing special assistance in areas such as reading. She's a reading recovery teacher. She's been training as a dyslexia specialist, and . . . she has the opportunity to work with students in smaller groups to address their needs.

High Expectations. According to Ms. Malone, Jennifer holds high expectations for the students in her reading groups. She uses data to drive instruction and to differentiate instruction for individual students' needs.

Academic Accountability. Ms. Malone also talked about how Jennifer constantly shares information from assessments with classroom teachers. She models reading lessons for teachers and adjusts her schedule to meet with groups of students whose assessments have identified them as students in need of additional reading instruction in a small group setting or on an individual basis.

Building Relationships. When discussing the manner in which Jennifer approaches discipline in her classroom, Ms. Malone shared how Jennifer helped to implement a new schoolwide discipline system called Tribes that encourages the use of community circles. Within this curriculum, the teachers and students "take the time throughout the day to talk about how they feel, how they address emotional concerns, and how they can better cope with what is going on publicly." According to Ms. Malone, Jennifer implements this curriculum with multiple groups of students, and the administrators never see her students in the office. Further, Jennifer has built relationships of trust with parents through communication and patience.

Administrative Support. When discussing her perspective regarding the role of the school in the students' achievement, Ms. Malone shared the support that the school provides through an open door policy such as instructional coaches, instructional specialists, and teaming. In addition, the school focuses on closely examining the TEKS and "allowing data to drive their students' needs." She declared, "It's not that we dumb it down; it still is high intense instruction, but it is directly related to what that student needs. Further, Ms. Malone expressed, "We are all singing that same song that we wrote, modeling those same behaviors that we expect from teachers, we expect from parents and we expect of students." Ms. Malone also realized that enjoyment in learning should not be lost to prepare for standardized tests.

Staff members act as mentors by taking "ownership of all the students." The campus also holds curriculum meetings that focus on content until 4:30 P.M. every Thursday, allowing teachers to meet with a coach or an instructional specialist. The school also recognizes students for their achievements. For instance, students are recognized if they meet the school's goal of 80% on an assessment. Ms. Malone also spoke about the community support that is connected with the school.

Personal Background

Professional Background. During the month of March when the researcher met with Jennifer Mason, a reading specialist for kindergarten through fifth grade, she identified herself as an African American woman in her early 40's. Jennifer shared a classroom with another teacher, and their areas were divided by a partition. In Jennifer's area, a table in the shape of a horseshoe sat in the middle of the room with student chairs

surrounding it in order to facilitate small group instruction. Books and dry erase boards sat on the horseshoe table, and a word wall was located directly behind the table.

In 1992 Jennifer completed the undergraduate elementary teacher preparation program at the highly selective public university in Texas that was chosen for this study. Jennifer is certified in the area of reading, and she also holds a bachelor's degree in dance. Within her 14 years of teaching experience on 2 different campuses, Jennifer taught second, third, and fourth grade prior to becoming a reading specialist. In her six-year role as a reading specialist, Jennifer serves as a resource in the area of reading for her campus, and she meets with small groups of students throughout the day to assist students who are having difficulty reading.

On Jennifer's first campus, the students were predominantly white, but on her current campus, the students have been predominantly African American since she began teaching there six years ago. Jennifer described the socioeconomic status of her students as poverty.

Cultural Background. Although Jennifer identified herself as African American, she indicated that she "grew up in both worlds" because her African American mother married her white stepfather when she was four years old. Jennifer described her own socioeconomic status when she was a child as "working class." Her mother was a caregiver at a state hospital for many years. She also cooked for a daycare and provided catering for several events. Her father was a professor and a lawyer, but Jennifer indicated that he was not a "high class lawyer." Jennifer attended a Catholic private school until she enrolled in a public junior high school after convincing her parents that

she needed to learn how to type in order to get summer jobs. Although Jennifer noted that the tuition for the private school was expensive at the time, she speculated that her parents allowed her to attend public schools because they were tired of paying the private school tuition.

Jennifer described her current socioeconomic status as middle class. She is married and has two children who are in elementary school. Jennifer's husband works as a contractor, and they live in a diverse middle-class neighborhood that has white, African American, and Hispanic residents. Her two children attend a private Christian elementary school. Although the private school has predominantly white students, Jennifer conveyed that she has chosen the school because of its diverse population that also includes African American, Hispanic, Asian, and Indian students from all socioeconomic backgrounds and academic abilities. Jennifer disclosed that her children attend the school on a scholarship, so they only have to pay half of the tuition cost. One of the school's mottos is "diversity in excellence." According to Jennifer, the students' birthday parties they have attended include a "rainbow" of racial backgrounds.

Perceptions of Culture

In addition to factors such as tradition, food, and clothing, Jennifer declared that culture consists of "how your family relates to each other and the broader community." When thinking of what constitutes cultural differences, Jennifer has observed that the African American parents of the students in her school seem to be a "little less demonstrative with their children." From Jennifer's perspective, the Hispanic culture seems to be "a lot more loving and gentle," embracing the concept of "a whole village

surrounds a child." Jennifer has also noticed that African American parents with more affluent backgrounds "talk" to their children as opposed to stifling them by telling them to "shut up" or "be quiet." Further, Jennifer has noticed that in more affluent families, "There is a work ethic that seems to be present that is not present in the impoverished culture."

When Jennifer reflected upon her decision to become a teacher, she shared her concerns with her racial background not being frequently represented in the teaching field:

> My whole reason for going back to get my teaching certificate as opposed to something with dance was dancing around at all the different elementary schools. I didn't see very many black educators, even in schools where they had majority African American students. I thought these kids need to see us some time in their elementary career.

Jennifer indicated that the cultural differences existing between her students and herself are economical in nature. Jennifer conveyed that she was raised in a working-class family while her students are impoverished with unemployed parents who live in government housing and receive welfare payments.

> What I have noticed is that there have been more Hispanic, Indian or African families that will actually move in and out of here. They will come in, get their lives together, and move on. African Americans will stay here generation after generation. There, of course, are some Hispanic families like that. There are far more of them that move on to live in a house or to move into an apartment complex as opposed to staying in government housing.

Although Jennifer has found differences between her students and herself, she noted that she has also pointed out the similarities with her African American students:

> I'm African American, and yes, I have told a child or two that you are embarrassing me. I am an African American woman, and you are making me

> look bad, and you need to stop that. I didn't just say that. I explained what they were doing and how that made us look bad.

In Jennifer's experience with the cultural backgrounds of the student population, she has found that the students do not get much support at home, so she has to compensate for that at school.

> Because you know that they are not getting much help at home, we do everything we can while they are here. There's not going to be a whole lot of practice that gets done at home, so you just try to build it into your time. I know that they are not going to take home those little books and read them to anyone, so I build in time at the beginning of my lesson where they take out their little books, and they just read.
>
> Because we know there is not enough support there, we try to have after school programs, and we do the tutoring. We do all of that because we know they still need it, and we do try to get the parents more involved. So many of them don't know how to help or their education doesn't allow them to be able to help. We have some that don't speak much English.

When thinking about how she recognizes students' culture in her classroom, Jennifer explained how she makes sure that students "see themselves" and their cultural backgrounds in their reading selections. With African American students, she has found that using bodily kinesthetic activities, tactile activities, music, and books in which "they can find themselves" are strategies that she has found to be effective. Jennifer expressed that it can be difficult to find books with African American children in them, but publishing companies are doing better with it. In addition, Jennifer serves on the black history committee. As a part of her role as the reading specialist, she visits classrooms to see if they have pictures posted of what they read to their classes. Jennifer shared a story of how she was upset to find that a teacher neglected to have diverse visuals posted in her classroom.

> I went into her room to relieve her during testing. I was looking around the room, and I saw all of these quotes and the drawings of the teacher that made these quotes. They were all Anglo--every one of them. There was Martin Luther King without a picture and one of his sayings, like, I have a dream. That was it. I just politely asked, "What about these people and this person and this person." She said, "Well, I didn't have a drawing of that person." I said, "I'm sure you could go on the internet and find something." It just bothered me.
>
> It was fifth grade, and she was always yelling and screaming at the kids. They don't have a whole lot of respect. Why should they when even what you are showing in your room is not valuing them, not even Hispanic? There was nothing. She wasn't really the kind of person that you could do a whole lot with. I noticed that and at least made the attempt to have the conversation.

Jennifer relayed that the greatest academic needs of her students involve the concern with them entering school without any educational experiences that are quality preschool experiences. Jennifer suspected that "they probably were sat in front of the television since they were babies." Consequently, Jennifer reflected that the teachers have to compensate for the educational experiences that they lack. Jennifer conveyed that her students' personal needs involve "positive attention, nurturing, and someone to listen to them who really care about what it is they have to say." Further, Jennifer expressed her concerns with the manner in which many of her students communicate:

> So many of them won't even talk. They don't know how to just talk to you. They know how to answer, but they don't know how to hold a conversation. They might talk to each other, but they probably don't get a whole lot of adult to child conversation.

When Jennifer reflected upon the concern with the underachievement of many African American students, she attributed the problem to their parents' lack of educational opportunities:

> People that achieve usually came from families that made it academically, somehow. So many African American families are impoverished and are just struggling to get from one day to the next. They don't have a lot of time and

> energy that they can put into educating or helping their children to be educated. There are a lot of people in that same boat, but there just seems to be so many more of us compared to others.

In Jennifer's opinion, the educational experiences of African American students in public schools differ from those of white students in public schools. Jennifer reflected upon her experiences at school with predominantly white students.

> I worked at a school for eight years, and it is predominantly Anglo. It could be that the district was a little different, but that's really not it. Teaching there was such a joy because you were challenged to come up with new and interesting and different ways of teaching these kids. . . . What you can teach over here is so restricted. You have to teach to whatever test is the measure. It was a bit of a concern, but it did not drive our curriculum over there.
>
> Over here it drives our curriculum, and it has done that for many, many years. Before TAKS, even when it was TAAS, it was still driving what you had to do here, and it's restrictive. You can't be as creative. The district comes in and genuinely is sincere and wants the children to succeed. I think they somehow think they can't unless they put all of these structures and procedures and things in place. They could be right.

Jennifer recalled a student in first grade who is doing well in her reading group, for in one semester she has progressed from a kindergarten reading level to a first grade reading level that is equivalent to where a first grade student should be in the middle of first grade. Jennifer suspected that "she caught up because she works hard, and she has strong parental support to help her." According to Jennifer, the parents came in asking for books and what they can do in the classroom. Further, Jennifer stated, "They actually came to parent conferences, so she has that support."

Jennifer asserted that her relationships with parents are mostly positive. Since she is the reading specialist, she often speaks with parents about students' reading abilities and dyslexia testing. When she had an angry parent who came in to speak with

the homeroom teacher about her child's lack of progress, Jennifer shared how she calmed the parent down. Jennifer noted that the conversation was uncomfortable, but she was successful in communicating to the parent that the student was sleeping at school because he was tired.

Beliefs About Teaching

As she reflected upon her beliefs about teaching, Jennifer declared, "It sounds trite, but I really do believe that all children can learn if they are taught in the way that they need to learn. It's not the same for all children." Further, Jennifer indicated that her beliefs about what her students should learn include how to read, how to have a hunger for knowledge, and how to be a good citizen who works hard and cares about people. Jennifer conveyed that she tells her students that excellence is "something that we should all strive for, something that can be achieved if you work hard enough for it, and something that is kind of a moving target." Further, Jennifer asserted, "Once you've achieved excellence, you can go further and further and further."

From Jennifer's perspective, the most important teachings that she can impress upon her students include self-respect, self-confidence, and how not to completely rely on others:

> The most important thing is self-respect. We push a lot and talk to them a lot about respect and respect for others. I also tell them, "Okay, if you are coming to school, you are not ready, you aren't doing your homework, and you are sitting slumped over with your head on your desk, are you having respect for yourself? Are you having respect for your education?" We always talk about having respect for yourself and coming to school and saying, "I'm going to learn something today. I'm going to be motivated. I'm going to motivate myself to learn something so I can make myself a better person." That would be the most important thing.

> The next thing would be just not to completely rely on others to do for you, making sure that you have what it takes to do for yourself and have that self-motivation to overcome whatever it is and just being confident. At the beginning of the year, we talked a lot about how we all don't learn at the same rate, and sometimes some of us read a little slower than others. . . . I had to work really hard to read. I remember having to go to a little group with the nuns and read. I remember having to take those little standardized tests and how much I hated them. I talk to them about that. I worked hard, and I hated those classes. I was in a little group, so I try to relate to them in that way.

Even though Jennifer's students come to her class because they are having difficulty reading, she expressed that she still holds high expectations for them because she wants them to be successful:

> I always tell my students that just because something is hard, it doesn't mean that you can't do it. You put the effort into it, you work at it. I always use myself as an example because I was always terrible in math. I had to work at it. It's the same thing for you. You may not be good at something. It may not come easy to you the first time, but you put the effort into it. If you work hard, you can get there. That's what we try to teach the kids.

With discipline, Jennifer shared that teachers must be firm, consistent, and loving so that "they know that you genuinely care about them." In Jennifer's opinion, the daily interpersonal interactions that she has with her students are "vital to whether or not you are going to have a positive day or a negative day." She reflected upon some of the situations that have occurred in her classroom with students:

> Just today I had a small group of four kiddos. Three of them are boys, and they are all little African American boys. They are a challenge. You just have to pick and choose your battles, and as long as they are not completely disrupting the group, let some things go and just try to keep looking for the positive, the praising.

Academic Accountability

In order to make sure that the academic needs of her students are met, Jennifer shared that she takes anecdotal notes, analyzes data, and implements strategies to help students become successful. Jennifer also shared her thoughts about standardized testing:

> I don't have a problem with standardized testing as long as it doesn't interfere with the quality of education, and currently, it interferes with quality education. We teach to the test. It's happening more and more and more across the entire district. I don't care what your socioeconomic status might be. They are doing far more benchmark testing and release TAKS testing and all of that stuff in schools all across the district.
>
> That bothers me after being at that middle-class school and doing such fun interesting, engaging activities that these kids just don't get the chance to do because they are too busy working on the tests. I think there does need to be a measure, and I'm fine with that. Let's not make it impact our daily lives so much.

Teacher Preparation

University Coursework. When Jennifer was attending the undergraduate elementary teacher preparation program at the highly selective public university in Texas, she took a class that focused on multiculturalism prior to completing the program in 1992. Jennifer conveyed that it was useful in helping her to think about the meaning of culture and the differences between culture, ethnicity, and race. Jennifer declared, "It kind of forced me to really look at it and think about it."

One of Jennifer's instructors really made an impression upon her the first day of class when he read Hoffman's (1991) *Amazing Grace,* a children's book in which the main character is an African American girl. Jennifer expressed that it felt as though the professor was reading the book to her instead of to the whole class. Jennifer declared, "I really connected with him from that point on." This reading course prompted Jennifer to

note that children need to "see themselves in books." Jennifer indicated that some of her content area classes helped her to acquire some effective teaching strategies in the areas of science, reading, and writing, but the reading class in which the professor read Hoffman's (1991) *Amazing Grace* was the only one that made connections regarding diverse student populations.

Field Experiences. With her field experiences in the teacher preparation program, Jennifer shared that before the university placed her on the west side of the city, she "deliberately asked" to do her student teaching on the east side of the city where she was raised as a child. She had been working on the west side in a daycare prior to her student teaching assignment, and the majority of the students were from affluent backgrounds. Jennifer conveyed that she wanted to work in a working-class school on the east side of the city since she had no prior experience with those students.

Jennifer was granted her request to complete her student teaching assignment in a working-class school. She observed for one semester, and she taught for one semester:

> It was really great because you really got to know the kids and got to be close to the kids and some of the parents and the teacher. Somewhere in there I think my teacher got married, so I spent about a week or two while she was on her honeymoon at another school on the west side of the city with predominantly white students, and that was interesting. It was in a very traditional classroom where the kids just sat in rows and did worksheet after worksheet after worksheet. To see that compared to what my supervising teacher was trying to do on the east side of the city was just like night and day.

Jennifer indicated that her student teaching experience prepared her to work at a school in which the students came from working-class families, but it did not prepare her to work with her current students who live in low-income government housing.

Contributions to Success

As Jennifer pondered why she is effective with African American students, she declared, "I can relate to them."

> I subbed for a little bit. An Anglo teacher came up to me and she said, "That class doesn't behave for their teacher the way that they have behaved for you. What did you do?" I hadn't had any real difficulty with that class at all. I said, "I was just myself." I really think that it has a lot to do with being a black woman. They don't try me or challenge me in the way that they will a lot of other teachers. I think they see their mama, so they know how to act.

From Jennifer's perspective, the role of the school administration is simply "to set up systems and procedures that will help the children and teachers to be successful." In addition, Jennifer expressed that the administrators' role with teachers is to "make sure that almost everything you do really has a purpose" and "that you are not wasting anybody's time."

Other factors that Jennifer attributed to her success include her year-long student teaching assignment and the reading course that integrated multiculturalism. Jennifer indicated the she needed more classes that integrated multiculturalism.

Since she has been teaching, Jennifer shared that learning more strategies to employ with African American students, understanding their families, and understanding their home environments has helped her to become more successful with African American students.

Evette

I look at teaching as an opportunity to not necessarily make students into what I want them to be but just to help them both realize their potential and that with hard work and effort, they can be anything they want to be.

Principal Nomination

Teaching Practices. The researcher met with Ms. Malone, the principal of Spencer Elementary School, during the month of February to conduct the interview. Ms. Malone expressed that Evette Tate, a third grade teacher, is an effective teacher of African American students because her experiences as a teacher and her professional development opportunities have assisted her in being able to assess students' instructional needs in order for them to be successful.

High Expectations. Evette is commended by Ms. Malone because "she does get the results" through "hard work," even though the majority of her students are not at grade level. Ms. Malone also wanted to clarify that her success goes beyond TAKS data because the TAKS is only a snapshot of student success. In addition, Ms. Malone said, "we know they need to do other things outside the TAKS and beyond that."

Academic Accountability. Although Evette's benchmark assessments may not be as strong when compared to her team, Ms. Malone discussed how Evette analyzes the data and adjusts interventions as necessary. According to Ms. Malone, Evette and the staff members at this school continue to teach their students and address their needs because TAKS is "only one sign of achievement" and "one reflection that they are being prepared." Since Spencer Elementary School is a Reading First campus, an emphasis is placed on the use of effective reading interventions with students who are having

difficulty. From the 2004 to 2006, the percentage of students passing the reading TAKS in Evette's classes experienced growth from 31% percent of the students passing to 88% of the students passing. The percentage of African American students who passed the reading TAKS in 2006 was 86%.

Building Relationships. To Ms. Malone, Evette is a teacher who recognizes her role in the students' success. Further, Evette embodies the school climate of building relationships of trust with parents through communication. Ms. Malone remarked, "Not everything that the parent says is something that we always want to hear, but we are patient and we allow the parents to say what they have to say to a certain point and we move forward."

Administrative Support. When thinking about the role of the school in the students' achievement, Ms. Malone remarked, "We have to look at overall how prepared our students are, and although we are working in that direction, sometimes our children come in really low." She went on to add that in certain other schools, the teachers are accustomed to students coming in who know their letters, how to read, and how to spell their name. At Spencer Elementary School, however, that is not the case because the students "are starting at a different place," and "the teachers are having to catch up."

Personal Background

Professional Background. When the researcher met with Evette in her classroom during the month of March, Evette identified herself as an African American woman in her late 20's. Her classroom was spacious with student work, classroom expectations, and criteria charts lining the walls.

In 2000 Evette graduated with a bachelor's degree in applied learning and development from the elementary teacher preparation program at the highly selective public university in Texas that was selected for this study. Her certification areas include kindergarten through eighth grade, reading, and ESL.

Evette has been teaching for 6 years at Spencer Elementary School, and the majority of her students have been African American for the past 2 years. She taught 1 year of second grade before becoming a third grade teacher. Of Evette's 13 students, 95% of them have a low socioeconomic status.

Cultural Background. Evette described herself as an African American woman. Her parents are from South America, and they incorporated a West Indian culture into their family. Although she was born in a large northern city, Evette was raised in a mid-size city in Texas. Evette and her older brother experienced homelessness as young children when her family initially moved to Texas, and she lived in several low-income neighborhoods. When her family became financially stable, they progressed to middle class. Her mother is currently a registered nurse, and her father is an accountant. Since Evette lived in a small town, she attended public schools with diverse populations. Evette described her current socioeconomic status as middle class. Her husband installs office furniture, and they live in an upper middle-class neighborhood.

Perceptions of Culture

From Evette's perspective, culture entails a person's beliefs and way of living. Evette noted the cultural differences that exist between herself and her students:

> What I've noticed with my kids is that they don't, for the most part, understand the value of things that they get. They don't understand that people have to work hard. I wouldn't say that's true for all of them, but for most of them, they don't understand sometimes whether it's their parents or whether it's school administrators, that you have to work hard for what you get. . . . Then again that might go with age, not necessarily culture. Sometimes the parents kind of have that view and kind of pass it on to the students.
>
> They definitely, for the most part, come from larger, close-knit families. My family was small and kind of spread out. I wasn't really close to my grandparents a whole lot. With them, aunts, uncles, and grandparents are involved. If you can't find mom or dad, you can usually find some family member or some close family friend to call on if you need their help, which is a lot different from my family.

Although Evette's students tend to have "close-knit" families, she indicated that the support for education from their parents varies:

> I've had some parents that will tell them in front of me, "When you come to school, your job is to learn. You are not worrying about anything else or anybody else. Your job is to learn." If they are taught that, then I think it's a lot easier for them to fall into that and actually practice that. That's not always true. With the ones who are not getting that reinforcement at home, you can tell there is a difference in their attitude and their motivation at school.
>
> At the same time, that always doesn't go hand in hand. I will have some parents who will say you let me know if they aren't paying attention and if they aren't listening and turning in their homework because I tell them all the time that they need to be focused on their learning when they come to school. The time that you need them they aren't there, and they aren't backing that up with their support and actually being there for their child when they need them.

In order to recognize students' culture, Evette shared that she does so by getting to know more about her students, their parents, and their relatives. In addition, Evette relayed that she listens to them so that she can incorporate their interests and their neighborhoods. Allowing students to express themselves is also a way in which Evette recognizes students' culture.

Evette has noticed that the students' academic needs involve their interest in reading because it has been much more difficult to peak the students' interests in reading at school and at home. Further, Evette suspected that the students' home environments play an important part with their academic and personal needs regarding reading:

> There is really a lack of being pushed at home with so many things they have to deal with, looking after younger siblings and taking care of this and that. I understand that it is difficult for them, and I encourage mine to go not only to the library here, but also to the public library. I have a few who do go to the library on their own. I think that's really important, just having them exposed to different types of books and literature. I think it will make a really huge difference.
>
> Aside from that, I'm remembering my childhood growing up, just having somebody there, and it doesn't necessarily have to be somebody at home, just having somebody there who they can go to after school and say, "I need help with my homework. Can you help me?" I know for me it was always my dad because I was horrible at math. He was always there to show me, and a lot of the kids don't have that. That's another thing that I would say would be helpful.

With her African American students, Evette has noticed that the achievement gap persists because of their home environments. Evette expressed her belief that the African American families at her school want their children to succeed and do not have difficulty identifying what to do for their children in order to assist them with their education. However, she has found that many of the parents lack the "tools" necessary to help their children succeed:

> It seems to be a cycle with a lot of the families. Maybe mom dropped out of school early or grandma dropped out of school early, and they really don't know where to go or who to talk to and at times feel very insecure in trying to figure out ways to help their child.
>
> Then, on the other hand, I've seen a lot of outside influences. I think a lot of the male students see older brothers and older cousins in the neighborhood doing things, and they say, okay, oh, yeah, he's making a lot of money. I need to follow in his footsteps. Not enough positive role models exist. I've seen that a

> lot, a lot. It's hard to undermine things because that's what they see everyday, and it's hard to kind of steer them in a different direction.

As she pondered the differences between educational experiences of white students in public schools and those of African American students, Evette had to recall her own experiences:

> It's hard for me to talk about the educational experience of white students. I have to think back to my days in school. I can definitely say that white students' experiences seem to be a lot more positive, just in general. At times it seems like they may have access to more resources to make their experience a more positive one with more support and more encouragement. To me, naturally, I think the expectation is there that they will succeed no matter what, whereas for minority students that is not always the case.

Despite a student's home environment, Evette was able to reflect upon an African American student who is doing well in her class:

> He has made a lot of progress from the beginning of the year to now with his reading and is just very naturally gifted with math. The one difficulty I have with him is getting him to focus himself and focus his energy. He has a brilliant mind but sometimes is really disorganized in his thinking and disorganized in general. At the same time, he does extremely well in school. I think the school work comes easy for him, and he just needs to be challenged. He constantly has to have someone there, redirecting him and keeping him confident and keeping him on task.
>
> At the beginning of the year, he was living with his grandparents. Any time I had an issue with him, whether it was not turning in homework or sleeping in class, grandma and grandpa both came and dealt with him. Now he is living with mom, and the situation is not as stable as it was before. He actually told me last week that his father was supposed to be going to jail, which had him very upset and has had an affect on his schoolwork and his attitude at school. It's been hard to keep him motivated. He has his good days and his bad days. His grandma and grandpa aren't there as much. I think they are trying to let go and let mom do more, but at the same time it's not really helping him.

With both her students and their parents, Evette discussed the importance of building relationships and having positive interactions with them. Evette conveyed that

she enjoys when parents let her know that "they do care about how their child is doing and not only that, but coming and asking me what they can do at home to help their child." Evette could only remember one difficult interaction that she has had with parents involving a parent who accused her of discriminating against her child because she was biracial with a Hispanic mother and an African American father. Evette indicated that the situation was difficult because the student was one of her best students; however, she was mischievous and knew how to push her mother's buttons when she did not get her way at school.

In order to build relationships with her students, Evette discussed how she identifies similarities and shares them with her students:

> I tell my students some of the strategies that I teach them I have to use them, too, because I would consider myself not to be a very quick thinker, and I have a few students who are very fast and like to yell out answers. I encourage them to use the strategies that we learn. I will tell them, "I am your teacher, and I have to do these things. I have to use these strategies, so think about how it's going to help you." I have a lot of students that have to kind of stop, and it takes them a while to process. That's how I am. It doesn't come to me very quickly, and I have to stop and think.
>
> Today I was talking to my students about blending and kind of making the connection from blending to spelling and one of my higher students said, "You are going too slow. You need to read the words faster and stop blending all the words." I said, "Think about it. For me, even in my real life, I have to stop and think about how I am going to spell a word, the sounds in the word, and what letters make up those sounds. I have to do that. So it's easier for people when they hear the sounds to spell it. It may be easier for you, and you may have it all memorized, but think about the ones like me that have to do the blending and think about the sounds, so just be patient because it's my fault."

Evette also reflected upon the ways she interacts with a particular student in her classroom:

> Ever so often throughout the day, she has to come and just talk to me, just to explain something that she has figured out. Today, for example, we were learning about fractions during math, and I think after a certain point she was going around the room and trying to find things that she could describe in fractions. It was like the fifth time she did this today. She has to do it. She kind of seeks that positive feedback whenever she figures something out.
>
> She always comes to me with a smile. She told me, "You know what I realized? If you got another table just like this and put it together, it would make one whole, and this is one half." I could be working with another student, but she has to stop me and let me know. I just stop and listen because I know that's really important to her. It could be something weird or something really strange, but I know it's important to her to have somebody to listen to her. Thinking about her background, she has a younger sister who is really outgoing and kind of steals the show all the time, so she kind of has to sit back, and she's really coming out of her shell. When she realizes, she is going to listen to me, then it really helps her self-esteem.

Beliefs About Teaching

When reflecting upon her beliefs about teaching, Evette declared, "I look at teaching as an opportunity to not necessarily make students into what I want them to be but just to help them realize their potential and realize with hard work and effort, they can be anything they want to be."

For Evette, excellence entails identifying ways to "become better." Further, Evette discussed how she emphasizes to students "the importance of doing their best work and thinking of ways to make their work better."

With African American students, Evette has found some teaching strategies to be effective with African American students:

> I just bring in the things that they know. I refer to the music, and just kind of tie things in that they are used to hearing about, and what that does is really get them motivated and really holds their attention. Music would be just one example. I just tap into the things I know they like, making the experience more fun for them and just providing references to things that they are used to and know well.

Academic Accountability

In order to make sure that the academic needs of her students are met, Evette conveyed that she relies on data gained through assessments to guide her instruction:

> We do a lot of data analysis, so we can clearly see if they are lacking in a skill, and we can pinpoint it and adjust our groups as we need to. I find with a lot of my students, they just work better with one on one help. If I'm able to sit down with them and kind of figure out what they are thinking and what they already have, I'm able to work with that a lot better.

Aside from formal assessment, Evette indicated that she uses informal observations to identify students' areas of difficulty, and she makes sure that students have a successful experience in her classroom. For instance, in reading Evette indicated that she makes sure that students are reading books on their level so that they are not being frustrated by trying to compete with other students. Further, this helps all of her students feel successful as they strive to meet the state's academic standards.

In order to close the achievement gap, Evette asserted that she makes sure that "each child's needs are met" in her classroom by "understanding and knowing that each child is different." For Evette, this includes making sure that she is assessing properly and making sure that she is "catching students where they need to be caught."

When thinking about standardized testing, Evette declared, "I don't like it because it's not a true measure of how much they know." Further, Evette shared her perspective on how preparing for standardized tests affects students:

> I feel like there could be better ways for our kids to be assessed, and to have them sit for hours and hours learning strategies is not really learning. You are learning strategies and tricks on how to take a test in order to pass it. I think there are better ways to assess how much they know.

Teacher Preparation

University Coursework. When Evette attended the undergraduate elementary teacher preparation program at the highly selective public university in Texas that was chosen for this study, she took one class prior to her graduation in 2000 that focused on cultural differences. However, Evette conveyed that it did not necessarily prepare her to be effective with African American students.

> There was one class that I took. I don't remember the name of it, but it had to do with cultural differences. That was an interesting experience. I wouldn't say it prepared me, but it made me aware of a lot of other people's views and other people's experiences. That class, I think, kind of motivated me a little bit more to really seek out this population. There were a lot of things I was hearing from other people, and it made me angry. It made me feel like I wanted to be something to prove them wrong.

Field Experiences. During her field experiences in the teacher preparation program, Evette both volunteered and completed her student teaching assignment at schools with diverse populations and socioeconomic backgrounds. When she served as a volunteer, three schools had mostly Hispanic and African American students, and one school had predominantly white students. During her student teaching assignment, she observed for one semester and taught for one semester at a school with predominantly Hispanic students and a number of African American students. According to Evette, she understood the importance of being consistently fair, especially with discipline. She also acquired the understanding that every child does not "work the same way" or "do the same things." In order to meet the needs of every child, Evette noted that teachers "have to modify a little bit to accommodate different behaviors and experiences."

Evette reflected upon a volunteer experience that she had as a mentor:

> I had two girls I was mentoring, and I remember going the first time and the teacher telling me the first little girl that I mentored wasn't reading on grade level, and her behavior was suffering. That really made the difference for me, just giving her a chance to kind of express herself, talk about things that were going on at home, talk about her feelings, and taking time to get to know her and understand her. I've always found that to be the difference.
>
> Once they see that you actually care about them as a person, then they are more willing to open up and try new things. I know with her she never liked to read, but one of the things that we always did was go to the library. I would let her choose a book, and we would read together. That was something that she actually looked forward to.

Contributions to Success

Evette contributed her effectiveness with African American students to having the desire to "be a positive role model" and "change some of the things" that the students experienced in school. Evette declared, "I believe in them, and I believe that they can do well."

During her field experiences, Evette recalled thinking that her coursework had not prepared her for her student teaching assignment; therefore, the actual student teaching assignment helped to prepare her for effectiveness with African American students. Evette conveyed that she was able to observe someone else teaching, so she learned how to interact with the students, identify "what works and what doesn't work," and determine "what made them tick."

Having instructors who "had actually been there" and could give her tips on how to be more successful would have been more helpful in preparing her to be successful with African American students instead of getting strange looks when she said she wanted to work in a school with minority students who have low socioeconomic

backgrounds. Evette found that many of her instructors "didn't have that experience, so they really couldn't tell you either way."

When thinking about the role of the administration in the students' achievement, Evette indicated that the family atmosphere is important:

> I think we really become a family. Everyone is very close-knit from the teachers to the students. A lot of the things that we talk to the students about and teach them about is consistent all the way across the board. It has really helped in turning our school around, and it really shows in the students. It's really been positive for us to be one and together.

Since she has been teaching, Evette has found that being involved more with the families has helped her to become more successful with African American students:

> One thing that has helped is just being more involved with the families, talking to them more, calling more, letting them know if their child had a good day or bad day, and that I'm noticing that they need to work on something or maybe practice at home. That's really helped. I think with a lot of the African American families, just letting them know, honestly know, that you really care about their child is important. That's really helpful.

Rustin Elementary School: Brenda and Martha

Campus Profile

Rustin Elementary School is located on the west side of the school district with approximately 249 students. The ethnic distribution of the students is as follows: African Americans, 28.9%; Hispanics, 45.0%; Whites, 24.9%; and Asian/Pacific Islanders, 1.2%. Economically Disadvantaged students on free and reduced lunch account for 30.5%. Limited English Proficient (LEP) students account for 0.4%. The ethnic distribution of the teachers is as follows: Hispanics, 14.4% and Whites, 77.6%. The average years of teaching experience is 9.1 years.

During the 2005-2006 school year, the school was designated a TEA Recognized rating based on campus performance indicators. During the 2004-2005 school year, Rustin Elementary School received an Academically Acceptable rating. During the 2003-2004 school year, Rustin Elementary School received a Recognized rating.

During the initial visit to Rustin Elementary School, the researcher noted that the school was located at the intersection of two highly traveled roads with a community college a few blocks away. Since the campus was enclosed in locked fences and visitors had to ring a bell in order to enter the school, the campus' concern with safety measures was evident. Inside the building, student work lined the walls and the ceilings as the researcher walked up the stairs to the office. While the researcher waited for the principal, she noticed that the office was furnished with comfortable sofas and chairs, and neatly decorated bulletin boards were on the walls.

Elise Bennett, the principal of Rustin Elementary School, is a white woman in her mid 30's. Her office was also neatly decorated with school memorabilia, and pictures of her family were on the walls and shelves. Ms. Bennett relayed that she has been in education for 11 years, and she has been a principal at Rustin Elementary School for 2 years. She nominated Brenda Wilson, a fifth grade math and science teacher, and Martha Trujillo, a third grade teacher.

Brenda

My teaching philosophy is to try to reach every child in some way. I look for improvement from when they walk into my classroom in August to when they walk out in May, whether that is academically, socially, or emotionally.

Principal Nomination

Teaching Practices. The researcher met with Elise Bennett, the principal of Rustin Elementary School, in her office during the month of February to conduct the interview. When asked why she nominated Brenda Wilson, a fifth grade science and math teacher, as an effective teacher of African American students, Ms. Bennett began to tell about the extent of Brenda's experience:

> Brenda has had a lot of experience working with special needs students. She's worked in the emotionally disturbed unit, and special education is her background. She brings those behavior intervention strategies into the classroom, looking at each kid individually and developing goals for them based on their strengths and areas of concern. She's very, very strong in that skill.

Ms. Bennett described Brenda's lessons as fun and hands-on. Brenda is a teacher who draws on students' interests by incorporating sports into the lessons she plans for math. She also engages students in a number of experiments in science.

In addition, Brenda's students are given the opportunity to do group and partner work. Brenda places the students in groups of mixed ability levels. In addition, Ms. Bennett said that Brenda is "skilled at questioning," using vocabulary whenever appropriate.

High Expectations. Ms. Bennett commented on how Brenda's class is very structured, and she knows what she wants to get out of the lesson, using assessments to

gauge where students are. She knows where students should be academically, and she adapts her instruction to the needs of the students.

Academic Accountability. When thinking about the overall performance of the students in the school, Ms. Bennett, declared, "We always struggle at our school with African American students. We see that achievement gap." According to Ms. Bennett, fifth grade has a "very small achievement gap," and their economically disadvantaged students outperform some of their other subgroups. In science last year, the students had a 94% passing rate. Further, Brenda was new to the grade level when the students achieved a 94% passing rate. The year before, the students had a 49% passing rate. During the 2005-2006 school year, the percentage of Brenda's students passing the science TAKS was above the state average of 76% for all students that were tested and 61% for African American students that were tested. As indicated in tables 4.13 and table 4.14, all of Brenda's students passed the math TAKS, and the percentages of students passing the science TAKS scores are above the aforementioned state average.

Table 4.13

Percentage of Students Passing TAKS

All Students	**Math**	**Science**
2006	100%	94%
	(n=17)	(n=17)

Table 4.14

Percentage of African American Students Passing TAKS

African American Students	**Math**	**Science**
2006	100%	83%
	(n=5)	(n=6)

Building Relationships. With discipline, Ms. Bennett recalled how Brenda builds relationships with both the students and their parents. Brenda is "vested in these kids and their lives." Although it is not often that discipline concerns occur in Brenda's class, Brenda would rather try to handle problems in her classroom than send students to the office. When serious offenses occur that require a referral to the office such as a fight, Brenda conferences with students and tries her best to get them back into the classroom as soon as possible. She would much rather impose consequences within the classroom.

Administrative Support. When thinking about the role of the school in the students' achievement, Ms. Bennett proclaimed, "We really believe in community. We're one community." According to Ms. Bennett, the teachers "are led in the belief that these are all of our kids, so it's a very supportive environment." The staff members, including Ms. Bennett, are all involved in some type of tutoring on the campus to support the students that are struggling. In addition, the campus meets in vertical teams at least twice a month to talk about lessons, strategies, and ways that they can craft their lessons better to increase student achievement. Since Rustin is a small campus of less

than 300 students, “there is a lot of sharing that goes on between teachers very informally, just in the hallways and at lunch and then also at meetings where they talk about children and strategies and things they may have used that might have been successful, or not successful.” Brenda is a part of this community of learners. Ms. Bennett, declared, “We’re a very reflective campus, and we all consider ourselves to be learners. We are all continuing to learn and grow. None of us are perfect. It’s a pretty collegial environment.”

Personal Background

Professional Background. When the researcher met Brenda Wilson, a fifth grade science and math teacher, during the month of March in her classroom to conduct the interview, Brenda identified herself as a white woman in her late 20’s. While in Brenda’s classroom, the researcher noticed that the room was spacious, and student work lined the walls.

In 2002 Brenda graduated with a bachelor’s degree in applied learning and development from the teacher preparation program at the highly selective public university chosen for this study. Her certification areas include the following: geography, general education for first through eighth grade, and special education for kindergarten though twelfth grade.

During her 5 years of teaching in two large urban school districts, Brenda taught emotionally disturbed students in kindergarten through fifth grade for 2 years, special education students in a resource classroom for 1 year, and fifth grade math and science for 2 years. Brenda has been teaching at Rustin Elementary School for the past 3 years.

Of her 34 students which are predominantly African American, a number of her students are Hispanic, and 1 is white. Compared to the other students in the school, Brenda indicated that her students have the lowest socioeconomic status in the school with 20% of them considered to have a low socioeconomic background.

Cultural Background. Brenda described herself as a white, middle-class woman from an "all-American" Methodist family. She was raised with her sister in a suburb of a large urban city in Texas with both of her parents. Brenda's mother is a teacher, and her father was a chemist. The small neighborhood schools that she attended had predominantly white students. Brenda indicated that her current socioeconomic status is middle class, and she lives in a neighborhood that has middle to upper-class residents. Brenda is married and was pregnant with her first child. Her husband is a strength and conditioning coach at a university.

Perceptions of Culture

To Brenda, culture encompasses several characteristics:

> Culture means everything. It's a huge word to me. I think it has to do with not only your race and your ethnicity, but it's also the culture that you are living in. It's what you know, what you've seen, and what you've been taught. It's a huge word to me. I don't even know that I can break it down. It's part of our everyday lives, really and truly.
>
> I think it's a good learning tool. It's important that we are aware of everybody's culture. That's something I notice a lot with our kids. They hurt each other's feelings because they tend to make fun of things. One kid will come in thinking it's totally normal and just something that they are used to, and somebody else will say something that will cause tension. I just think it's really important that we are aware of everything that encompasses culture and where you are in life.

For Brenda, cultural differences include family structure, neighborhood, religion, and academic background. At her previous campus, Brenda's students had a high mobility rate because they would "move in and out according to where they could get free rent." At her current campus, the student population is not as transient, and most of the students attend pre-kindergarten through sixth grade. With her current students, Brenda indicated that the main cultural differences include where they live, their surroundings, and their family dynamics:

> Actually being pregnant really kind of opened my eyes a lot to the way that I grew up, the way that my parents talked to me about family, what a family is, and being aware that my idea of family, what makes a family, and what's important is not always going to be the same everywhere in the city or wherever we are. I guess it's really important for me to be aware that everybody's situation is completely different, and what is valued in one person's house is not necessarily going to be valued in another person's house. I don't know if that makes sense.
>
> Before I was married, the kids were all wondering why I didn't have a baby. Everybody had babies. I'd say, "I'm not married yet. I don't have a husband." That was an eye opener to me, realizing that is not a value that everybody holds, and that it's just not something that works for everybody.

Brenda has observed that culture affects the teaching and learning process in the way that the students' parents react to education:

> For the majority of my parents that I've worked with in the past and that I'm working with this year, school is just something you have to do. It's not something that is number one necessarily; it's a requirement. I try to make the parents understand. I try to be very involved with them and share what my goals would be for their child. I've seen both ends of the support at home. I've seen parents who are there all the time, and when they are not there, they have very strict rules enforced.
>
> With this year in particular, school is just not important. You do your schoolwork here for eight hours. If you don't do your homework, then it's no big deal. If you aren't reading at home, then it's no big deal. I feel like part of that goes to the fact that a lot of the fifth grade homework is hard, and I think that the

> parents struggle with it. I've got parents who can't do the math, and I've got parents who can't do the reading.
>
> My struggle this year has been at parent conferences. I'm educating the parent on what we are doing in class as well as them trying to teach their child. It's like a catch 22. I don't know how to fix that as their teacher, but at the same time, I have to understand it. If you go home not understanding your homework and your parent can't understand your homework because maybe your parent had to drop out and get a job or whatever, how can you blame them for not getting it done at home? It affects everything that we do. The way that education is looked at in the home affects everything. It affects the kids' behavior here at school. It affects the progress that they are making or not making.

Brenda shared that her experiences in schools have helped her to understand that she has to recognize students' culture in the curriculum. Although Brenda's former campus consisted of all African American students, her current campus is more diverse with African American, Hispanic, and white students enrolled. Many of the students' parents at Brenda's school are employed, and many of the students have both parents at home. Brenda reflected upon how she recognizes students' culture in the curriculum:

> We do what's called the Tribes activities where we do a lot of community circles, and everybody has freedom of opinion, voice, and just a lot of communication activities to get to know the kids at the very beginning of the year. If I were a better teacher, I would continue it through the year. I just can't balance it all. I really focus in the first semester, really trying to get to know them, letting them know as much about me as they possibly can.
>
> I try to relate it as much as I can to situations. If we come across something in science that they don't understand or they have never seen before, I try to think of things that they could possibly relate it to in their culture. Our math book is pretty good about trying to pull culture in with the math. The science book doesn't do it that well, but the math books tries.

Brenda indicated that her students' greatest academic and personal needs include a lack of educational reinforcement for her students when they are at home. In order to compensate for the lack of parental support at home, Brenda provides after school tutoring because her students need "follow through." Brenda also discussed the manner

in which she tries to create a family atmosphere in the classroom since her students "don't go home to any place that has values or things that we would want to see in a work place or a school environment." According to Brenda, she wants students to learn how to respect each other and themselves as they plan for their futures. Further, she has noticed that "A lot of them don't really look towards the future; it's the here and now." Therefore, Brenda assists them in planning ahead with the belief that they can go to college.

As she pondered the concern with African American students' underachievement, Brenda discussed her experiences as a teacher in two large urban school districts:

> That kind of goes back to my first and second year of teaching. I was in an all black school. I was in an emotionally disturbed behavior unit, and it was eye opening to me, being a white girl from the suburbs. Parents were still babies themselves--single moms. I made myself very aware to the fact that when these babies go home, it's not about education; it's about surviving. It's about making it back to school the next day and somebody safe that they can rely on being there every single day.
>
> I guess that's kind of what opened my eyes to part of the underachievement that people are seeing. That was a great learning experience for me being put in that situation. Coming from a household that had two parents, one of them was always there to do homework. That is not how it is in the majority of places you go. That was probably my biggest learning experience. I'm going to have to do more in the classroom to make sure that these kids know I'm a stable force in their lives. They can do better. They can get out.

When thinking about an African American student who is doing well in her class, Brenda shared her reflections:

> I have a female. She is a self-starter. She is a strong reader. She is very well-organized and on top of her academics, and I can tell it's very important to her. Her parents are actually from Africa. I know she has some older siblings.

> She doesn't talk about them too much. I haven't really met with her parents too much. I met with them once, but she is involved in every after school program that we offer here. Both her parents work. I mean it's not that they are not supportive, and it's not that I think that they are super supportive.
>
> She just impresses me in the way that she is just so mature, and she has definite goals in mind. It's just very impressive for any fifth grader that I've seen. She's just one that sticks out.

According to Brenda, building relationships with her students and their parents is an important part of daily interpersonal interactions. Brenda expressed how she pays attention to her students so that she can understand more about their personal lives:

> If I know what is going on at home, if I know they didn't come and eat breakfast, if I know all they are going to have is Cheetos for lunch, then those little things help me gauge how our day is going to go big time. If you don't know what is going on with them, you are going to think they are just being disrespectful or that they are just being out of hand. If you know that they've had a rough weekend or over Christmas break, then you can kind of reacclimate them. They know I'm not going anywhere. They know I'm not going to leave. They know I'm going to be here tomorrow. If you are aware that it's not a personal thing and that they feel safe getting those feelings out with you, it makes your job a lot easier, and it makes you able to talk to them more and de-escalate problems before they get out of control.

Sharing commonalities with her students has helped Brenda to relate to them:

> I listen to the same music that they listen to. I watch the same TV shows that they watch. I feel like music and sports are two of the ways that I relate to the kids a lot. . . . It's important to me to know what the latest stuff is on MTV, BET, VH1, or wherever.
>
> I don't know why, but when I was younger, I got into this thing where I studied a bunch of African American history and African American leaders. It was just something I was really into when I was little, so I try to relate that to them and make sure that they understand that I know your history. If I don't know it, then I want to try to learn it.
>
> Making myself real to them is very important. Another similarity that I try to work on with them a lot is that they hurt my feelings just as much as I hurt their feelings. Empathy is a big thing that I try to work on with them. Anytime I can come up with something that we have in common, I point it out.

In building relationships with her students, Brenda disclosed that she admits to her students when she makes mistakes:

> I screw up a lot. I do. I say things that I shouldn't to them sometimes. I lose my temper with them before I should sometimes. But again, I try to be very honest with them in making them understand that when I make mistakes, I will admit to it. When I assume something that I shouldn't have, I try to be very real with them. I will say that I screwed up. That was my bad. I shouldn't have reacted like that. I shouldn't have jumped on them.

As Brenda reflected upon the manner in which she disciplines students, she shared some of her experiences with respecting her students:

> I was told one time by a parent during my second year of teaching that I didn't know anything about raising black children and how dare I discipline her child like that. Really and truly what I tried to make her understand is that I didn't see him as a black child; he was just a child. That just always sticks out in my head when I'm disciplining any of my kids. It's treating them with respect and discussing with them. I do a lot of private conversations.
>
> I want the kids to think through their problems. . . . I want them to learn from their mistakes. I want them to get better each time something happens. We talk a lot about the realities of what can happen. I talk a lot with especially my black male students about how smart most of them are. We talk about how most of them that are in prison are very intelligent men and that I don't want to see them go down that road. . . . That is a big issue that most of our prisons are filled with intelligent, black men. That's where a lot of their fathers are. . . . I talk to them about eventually doing better. That doesn't mean moving out of the area that you live in. It just means getting a better education.

Brenda shared both positive and difficult interactions that she has had with parents. She disclosed an incident in which a parent threatened her because she called Child Protective Services when she noticed a belt mark across his face. Nevertheless, Brenda indicated that most of her interactions with parents have been positive because she has had to "win them over and find that common ground" in order to build relationships with them:

> You have to find the common ground with the parents. I feel like as adults they are not as willing to be open a lot of times as the kids are and to learning about you. I try to get the parents up there as much as possible. I try to get on the phone with them as much as possible and communicate. I want them as involved in the education as they have time to be.
>
> I have some really supportive parents this year, and I think the thing that's good this year is that the parents are willing to come and talk to me and discuss things. I make sure that they know that I want what's best for their child. I'm not out to get their child. I'm not out to belittle their child or do anything that would hurt their child.

Beliefs About Teaching

When reflecting upon her beliefs about teaching, Brenda declared, "My teaching philosophy is to try to reach every child in some way." Further, Brenda asserted, "I look for improvement from when they walk into my classroom in August to when they walk out in May, whether that is academically, socially, or emotionally." Brenda reflected upon the most important teachings that she can impress upon her students:

> I work a lot on honesty and learning from their mistakes. They are going to mess up, but I make sure that they admit to it right away and that they are able to say what they could do differently next time instead of just trying to sneak out of things. That's a big one. I talk about respect for people, but also respect for their environment, their desks, and their things.
>
> We talk a lot about, with this class in general, making a first impression. The group that I have this year has a history that has traveled with them. It's just not good. I try to make them understand that first impressions aren't fair, and it's not an okay thing, but it's what happens. They have to be aware that others are always watching them and seeing how they are going to react to things. This year, the three things I think we work on are honesty, respect, and just working on your reputation.

With African American students, Brenda discussed strategies that she has found to help them be more successful:

> I get to know their moms as much as I can. I feel like their moms are very important to them. If I can say "I know you wouldn't act like that with your mother, and I know this is what she would do," then I feel like that's a big thing.

> Moms are so important. I feel like in the African American culture, moms are always the ones that are there. My kids think it's funny when I know the lingo, when I know what they are talking about, when I know they are talking about me, and I can call them out on it. I think it relates to music. When they are singing songs in my classroom, and I can say, "Yeah, we all know that was number three on the radio last night." They're like, "Oh, no, Miss." They get a kick out of it.
>
> It's just showing them that I'm not the typical what they think--a white girl who lives with her husband in a nice house that drive nice cars. They don't know. I just try to relate to them. Knowing what they do in their daily lives, knowing what they see, knowing what they hear, knowing what they talk about, and being able to communicate with them is really important to me. I think communication is a big, big, huge thing.

Brenda indicated that she makes sure the needs of her students are met through communication and by assessing them both formally and informally:

> I observe them, whether it's in the classroom working with groups, out at recess, or at lunch. I just kind of watch to see if there is anything behaviorally. You can tell a lot about what their needs are from their behavior. As far as academics, I do a lot of teaching and reteaching. This week we've been doing perimeter and area, so I've taught perimeter and area for three days with assessment on Wednesday. I graded it Wednesday night. On Thursday, they weren't getting it, so we did it again Thursday. It's a lot of back and forth, back and forth. I try not to move on until I'm sure the majority of them, at least 70%, are where I want them to be academically.

Although Brenda holds high expectations for her students, she expressed her belief in assessing growth:

> You have to gauge each student individually, and you have to strive for growth regardless. It may not be that TAKS test. It may not be math. It may just be that you see that they've changed in some way or that they grew in some way, maybe not based on academics. I look for improvement overall.

When thinking about excellence, Brenda conveyed that she focuses on the progress that her students have made:

> A lot of my kids get really down on themselves if they are doing TAKS practice, and they're not as good as everybody else. They've failed the TAKS

over and over and over again. I try to take the TAKS out of it, and again, that goes back to my teaching philosophy. If I can show them that from August to December they made progress somewhere and from December to May when they left me they made progress again somewhere, then that's what I consider their excellence.

I want the kids to be in charge of it. I want them to feel empowered. I want them to be aware, and say, "I'm doing the very best that I can." Not everybody is going to be an educational scholar. That's just all children in general. I think it's helping the kids find what it is that they can strive for in their own excellence. Unfortunately, in the state of Texas, we are kind of bound by that TAKS test, but it's not the end all, be all. I try to make these kids understand that they are going to be excellent in something. They have the ability to be excellent in something regardless of what some state standardized test tells you that you are excellent in.

Academic Accountability

When thinking about how she assesses her students beyond TAKS, Brenda shared her multiple strategies:

I try to look at the TEKS from the previous years. For instance, this year a lot of my kids were lacking fourth grade skills, so I took the fourth grade TEKS and lined them up with my fifth grade TEKS. I tried to integrate them as much as possible, so I was teaching fourth and fifth grade TEKS at the same time. That's how I did it this year. I do a lot of after school tutoring, and I try to do that on level for the kids.

I do a lot of observing. I watch the way that they are interacting with each other. I want them to start learning how to speak educationally as well as socially. A lot of times by fifth grade they've got the social part down. They are good at that. It's weaving that educational piece in there.

We use the interactive notebook a lot, so they are taking notes and doing their teacher work on one side, and then on the left side, that's their part. I will take those up and look at them. It gives them an avenue to create on their own. If they want to draw a picture, if they want to write a rap, and if they want to make charts and graphs of whatever we learned, I try to make it very individualized so that whatever that child is into, that's how they can show me what they are learning through my classes. That's another way that I assess what they are doing. Then there are just your basic daily assessments over lessons. I try to be on top of keeping the learning exciting. It's a necessary evil I guess.

As she pondered how she pursues closing the achievement gap for her students, Brenda indicated that she tries to make personal connections with them:

> I don't know if this is right or wrong, but I am very real with the kids. I'm honest with them about it. I want them to be aware that it's up to them. It's all back to the reputation and that unfortunate first impression. Oh, the majority of the kids at this school are black or Hispanic. Their grades are going to be low, or the scores are going to be low. I want the kids to be aware of that and say, "No, you aren't going to do that to us. We're going to make a difference."
>
> I think it's really important on the same hand that you have to be aware if you are closing that gap that a lot of the kids don't go home and talk about science stuff. They don't go home and watch the news. They don't go home and read the newspaper with their parents. They don't go home to anybody. They go home to an empty house. They get done what they can get done, or they go home and babysit their younger brothers and sisters while mom goes to work at night.
>
> You have to be aware of that, and you have to be aware that you have to bring those outside life experiences that a lot of kids with two parents in their house are getting. I think that it really and truly takes a better teacher to teach in a school where there are those big gaps. Those kids are going home to a support system that my kids don't have. As a teacher, you have to be aware of that. I think it makes the workload harder, but I also think it's very much more rewarding. That's what I do personally, beyond just making the kids aware that this is your history that you are creating, and you have to try to change it. You have to try to make it better.

When thinking about standardized testing, Brenda expressed her suggestions for change:

> I don't like them. I don't think they are fair assessments. I think they put too much stress on the kids. I really think that it should be that they come here in August, and they are tested. When they leave in May, they are tested, and there should be a percentage of increase that you should see with each child. It should be more individualized. If that child has made progress from August to May, then they have done their job and learned. It's kind of wishful thinking.

Teacher Preparation

University Coursework. When Brenda recalled the coursework in the undergraduate elementary teacher preparation program at the highly selective public

university in Texas that was chosen for this study, she indicated that she took only one course that came the closest to preparing her to work with diverse populations. The course involved cultural education that was offered during Brenda's senior year. Brenda remembered that they engaged in discussion and read "a lot of papers and articles on the educational gaps." According to Brenda, many of the students were in their student teaching assignments, and the instructor allowed them to bring in experiences that they were having in schools. As she pondered her teacher preparation experience, Brenda shared her reflections about the program:

> The thing that prepared me the most was my first and second year of teaching. I don't think my classes necessarily prepared me for the things I was going to experience. I feel like the teacher preparation program at the university is good. I learned how to teach. But it's not real world. It's this is what it's like in a perfect classroom with parents who are there to support you and kids who sit and listen and participate the right way and know how to behave in school. It doesn't prepare you for when you first step into that classroom. The kids don't have high expectations for themselves, and their parents may show up. I don't think that you get that in college--at least I didn't.

When recalling the courses that focused on subject matter, Brenda declared that they consisted mostly of "a lot fluff." Further, Brenda relayed that the classes had fun activities, but the professors did not focus on strategies that work or helping the prospective teachers determine whether or not their students were learning.

Field Experiences. During the field experiences in her teacher preparation program, Brenda's student teaching assignment consisted of one semester of observation and one semester of teaching in a school with predominantly white students of middle-class backgrounds. Although the school had "a few" Hispanic and African American

students, Brenda conveyed that the population of that school was "almost the exact opposite" of where she currently teaches.

Brenda described her supervising teacher from the university as "amazing," for she exposed Brenda to some effective teaching strategies:

> She observed me when I was student teaching both semesters. She always had constructive criticism. I think she really shaped my lessons. She was very thorough at looking at my lesson plans, making sure that I had an ultimate goal.

Contributions to Success

Although Brenda expressed that she likes to think of herself as a successful teacher in general, she conveyed that she is successful with African American students because she immerses herself in their culture:

> When it comes to relating with African American students, for me, it's immersing myself in their culture and making sure that I'm aware of the music that they listen to. I can talk to them and communicate with them on movies that they would watch. I can talk to them about favorite restaurants that we have in common and just everyday life activities that if they can look at me and say, "Okay, she's not so different than us."
>
> When I was a young teacher, I felt like a lot of my kids looked at me and said, "She has no idea." It was always important to me to kind of share with them that I am different than you, but I can relate to you and we can talk about stuff. If I don't know, I want to learn about it.
>
> Another story that I have with that is I was teaching seeds at my last campus. We were talking about avocados, a bunch of fruits, and my little boys were looking at me and staring at me. They had no idea what I was talking about. I said, "When you go to the grocery store with your mom, ask her to show you an avocado." They didn't shop at the grocery store. They shopped at the corner store when they had money to go. Introducing life experiences, being aware that there are differences, and letting them learn from me as much as I learn from them helps me find a common ground.

When thinking about her teacher preparation program, Brenda indicated that her supervising teacher attributed to her success with African American students. Brenda

asserted, “She was the one person I think that really taught me this is what you are teaching, this is why you are teaching it, and this is how you know the kids are being successful.” Brenda also expressed that her cooperating teacher, the teacher who allowed her to complete the student teaching assignment in her classroom, had many years of teaching experience and was important in her development as a teacher.

Brenda indicated that spending at least one semester outside of a student population with which a prospective teacher is comfortable would be helpful in preparing teachers to become more successful with diverse student populations. Brenda declared, “When you are uncomfortable, that’s when the real learning starts.” When Brenda accepted her first teaching position in a school with all African American students, she disclosed that “it was all about survival,” but she “ended up falling in love with it.” Further, Brenda indicated that having strategies before she accepted the position would have helped her to be more successful with African American students.

For Brenda, the role of the school in the students’ achievement is to “know as much educational history on the child as possible from as many teachers as possible.” For instance, if prior teachers had issues with parents, Brenda declared, “I want to figure out why, make it different, and see if I can change these parents’ attitude toward the school and try to get them up here more.” Further, Brenda asserted, “You can learn a lot from other teachers’ relationships with their parents and the children as well as just tracing the educational backgrounds.”

Since she has been teaching, “continuing to learn, to grow, and to evolve” has helped Brenda be more successful with African American students. Further, Brenda

shared that she practices being aware of what is going on in the city and being aware of issues that affect everyone at her school because that has helped her to relate to students when they walk through the door every day. Brenda proclaimed, "I don't want to get stuck in a rut. I don't want to be that old white lady who doesn't know anything about what my life is like."

Martha

I have the same standards for all of my kids,
and I expect the same things from them.

Principal Nomination

Teaching Practices. During the month of February, Ms. Bennett and I met in her office to conduct the interview. Ms. Bennett proclaimed that she nominated Martha Trujillo, a third grade teacher, as an effective teacher of African American students because her methods are similar to those of Brenda Wilson, a fifth grade math and science teacher who was also nominated for this study. Martha is described as a hands-on teacher who incorporates cooperative learning and students' interests into her "fun" daily lessons. When doing various math activities such as fractions and percentages, Martha uses sports comparisons to engage students. Labs and experiments are characteristic of Martha's science classes. High-level questioning and vocabulary development are used when Martha discusses science and math with her students.

High Expectations. In Martha's classroom, students are introduced to routines early in the year. Lessons incorporate warm-ups and are very structured. According to Ms. Bennett, Martha is a teacher who plans lessons by utilizing assessment data. She

knows what she wants to accomplish with each lesson, and she knows where the students are in their learning.

Academic Accountability. Ms. Bennett noted that in third grade, the students performed in the 90's, even with the school's problematic struggle with the achievement gap among African American students. Just as in fifth grade where Brenda Wilson, the other teacher nominated for this study, makes significant gains with African American students, third grade also has a very small achievement gap in reading. Students in third grade must pass the reading portion of the TAKS in order to be eligible for promotion to fourth grade.

Table 4.15

Percentage of Students Passing TAKS

All Students	**Reading**
2004	77%
	(n = 17)
2005	100%
	(n=18)
2006	100%
	(n = 16)

Table 4.16

Percentage of African American Students Passing TAKS

African American Students	**Reading**
2004	100%
	(n = 5)
2005	100%
	(n = 9)
2006	100%
	(n = 6)

Building Relationships. To accomplish effective communication with parents, Martha builds relationships with them. The small number of discipline concerns in her classroom is a testament of her capability to build relationships. Students who engage in inappropriate behavior have the benefit of a teacher who conferences with them about their concerns and prompts them to think about what they could have done differently. Martha's students are rarely sent to the office, and those who are sent to the office have committed serious offenses that require them to be there. Otherwise, Martha would impose classroom consequences for them instead of accompanying them to the office while discussing her expectations and their reflections regarding the incident.

Administrative Support. Ms. Bennett mentioned that Martha was the school's Teacher of the Year. Further, Ms. Bennett believes that Rustin Elementary School's sense of community and supportive environment gives Martha a place to thrive as a reflective learner. According to Ms. Bennett, Martha has a love for children and a belief that "all kids can be successful" without allowing their color, background, or socioeconomic status change that belief. "Very, very high expectations are held for all of the students," remarked Ms. Bennett. The students "try their hardest" and hold the belief that Martha believes in them and will not let them down.

Personal Background

Professional Background. When the researcher met with Martha Trujillo, a third grade teacher, in her classroom during the month of March to conduct the interview, Martha identified herself as a Hispanic woman in her early 30's. The student desks in

Martha's classroom were organized in groups of four. In the middle of the room, Martha had neatly stacked papers piled on a group of students' desks. Along with student work, classroom expectations were posted on the walls.

In 1999 Martha graduated with a bachelor's degree in applied learning and development from the undergraduate elementary teacher preparation program that was chosen for this study. Her certification areas include first through eighth grade regular education and music.

Of her 8 years of teaching experience, Martha taught beginning sixth grade band for 1 year and has been teaching third grade at her current campus for the past 7 years. Martha indicated that the majority of her students have been African American since she began teaching 8 years ago. Of Martha's 18 students, 22% are considered to have a low socioeconomic status according to state guidelines.

Cultural Background. Martha described herself as a middle-class Hispanic woman. Although her ancestors are from Mexico, her parents and grandparents are all from Texas. Martha grew up in south Texas with a low socioeconomic status. In a family of migrant workers, Martha worked in the fields during the summers and on holidays. When thinking about her experience as a migrant worker, Martha disclosed, "It kind of gave me perspective as to when my job gets hard here, it's not anywhere near how hard it could be."

Martha is married and has two young children. Since her husband gets paid well as an engineer, Martha indicated that she can afford to continue getting paid a teacher's salary. Martha described her neighborhood as middle class with predominantly white

residents and a small percentage of Indian and Hispanic residents. Martha indicated that her family is the only Hispanic family that they can identify in their neighborhood. When her children are old enough to go to school, Martha will allow them to attend the school where she works because the predominantly white school in her own neighborhood is "not real world." Martha declared, "I want them to come here because our school is so diverse, and I want them to experience that early on." Since Martha has chosen not to impose any particular religion upon her children, she talks about a variety of religions with them.

Perceptions of Culture

From Martha's perspective, culture involves the beliefs of her students' parents. According to Martha, parents help to shape their children's cultural backgrounds through their morals, celebrations, and beliefs about childrearing. With white, Hispanic, and African American students in her class, Martha has identified cultural differences that exist between her students and herself. Martha indicated that all of her students feel a sense of entitlement regarding the rationales for completing assignments. For instance, the students often wonder what they will get in return for doing their work.

> I think the hardest thing that I'm trying to instill in them is that you are not always going to be rewarded for the hard work that you do. You are going to have to, in the classroom anyway, just try your best, and it will pay off in the long run. You are getting an education right now, and it's not necessarily for some kind of outside reward.
>
> They want pizza, and they want more recess. They want more. They are not doing it just to learn. That's what I'm trying to instill in them right now. That's a big difference between them and me. I was just happy to be in school because it meant that I didn't have to be working in the fields. They feel like, "I have to be here, but what are you going to give me for my hard work?" That's the biggest difference.

In Martha's experience with teaching, she has observed that culture affects the teaching and learning process in the way that parents view education:

> If the culture thinks that education is key and is very important, then it affects my teaching in that it makes it easier because the parents will feel more inclined to help with homework every day and read with their kid every day. More and more I'm finding, especially with my Hispanic and African American kids, that a lot of the parents leave it up to the school to educate their child. It should be a learning experience on weekends, too, and when you go home also.
>
> Now that I have children of my own, I've noticed that when I take my kids to the children's museum or when I take them to the park, most of the children there are Anglo. It starts really early. I might find one African American family there or maybe one Hispanic family there. It might have to do with economics, too. Going to parks doesn't. I rarely see those minorities out with their children. I feel like more and more, not the burden, but the job of educating the children is placed solely on the school. It's like they are taking a step back and saying this is your job, not mine. It doesn't work out. With Anglo students, the standardized test is geared toward their experiences, and their parents are so involved from a very early age and stay involved.

Although Martha identified cultural differences that exist between her students and herself, she was also able to identify some similarities. Martha indicated that she is still learning about the cultural backgrounds of her white and African American students in the class' weekly community circle. Further, she indicated that she relates to her Hispanic students the most:

> I consider myself Hispanic, so I celebrate a lot of the Mexican traditions. I'm very familiar with them. I was brought up Catholic. A lot of my Hispanic kids talk to me about stuff that I had to do growing up like my first communion and my confirmation--all that religious, God fearing stuff.

Since Martha described her school as a transfer school, few of her students live in the neighborhood, so she finds it helpful to incorporate a number of cultural backgrounds in the students' curriculum:

> We have this literature that we subscribe to, and it's called *Time for Kids*. We get one every week, and every week they highlight a different culture. . . . The kids, even my African American kids, are not very familiar with what they go through in Africa today. They really don't have any idea where it is; they can't point it out on a map. I'm sure if I told my Hispanic kids to point out Spain or to point out Mexico, they would say, "Wow!"
>
> Today we spent an hour talking about some kids in Nairobi, Africa, and the struggles they go through. We spent an entire hour, and throughout the entire hour, my kids got so into it, raising their hands, concerned, angry because the females in that country a lot of times aren't encouraged to go to school, and they were angry about that.

From Martha's perspective, the greatest academic and personal needs of her students involve parental support:

> Half of my parents feel like education is all on the shoulders of the teacher and the school. I think that's the biggest challenge that my kids are facing right now. Learning never stops. . . . Many of the families are so busy, I think. I don't think it's that they don't care; I think they just get so busy that their child's education is on the back burner. . . . With more parental support, I think we would be so much more successful.

When comparing the educational experiences of white students in public schools to those of African American students, Martha disclosed that concerns with African Americans' underachievement have been closely related to socioeconomic status:

> I look at my data that I'm given at the beginning of the year, and it breaks my heart. We have our numbers in front of us of our Anglo students, Hispanic students, and our African American students, and a lot of times our low socioeconomic status numbers are closely tied to our African American numbers. I think that one of my biggest struggles as a teacher is how to remedy that. I can give them everything I have while I'm here, but when they go home, there's not much I can do.
>
> There are some things that my Anglo kids are more familiar with on those tests, and some of my African American kids have to ask sometimes, "What does this mean?" It does kind of get in the way with the problem solving, especially on the math or the reading tests where they can't develop any kind of real understanding if they don't know what those things are. That is a lesson in itself. That's a big struggle with the standardized tests because you have to go way back, and it's not that one is better than the other. It's just different. . . . The tests

> are kind of geared toward my Anglo students and their experiences as kids growing up. That's the biggest issue when we have these standardized tests. I have to explain to my African American kids, even to my Hispanic kids, what some of these things are.

Although achievement gaps are present at the beginning of the year with some of her African American students, Martha reflected upon an African American student who is doing well in her class:

> He is adopted with a single mom, and he is one of the highest students I have ever had. He is such a hard worker and a perfectionist. He just really self-monitors in terms of academics. On the behavioral side is where he has some issues. Academically, he is one of my highest kids, but behaviorally I really need to reign him in and keep him focused and keep him in the right direction. He is one of my gifted and talented kids, and his mom is his biggest advocate. She is always here.

When building relationships, Martha has found that having positive interactions with parents helps the students to be more successful. Although Martha has had to find positive ways to interact with defensive parents, she is pleased when parents trust their relationship with her enough to write notes, call her, or attend conferences to ask how they can assist their child. Martha indicated that the daily interpersonal interactions that she has with her students and their parents are very important to her.

> With the program that we have here at our school, we really encourage community among the staff, the children, and the parents. It's so important for me to know where each kid is coming from because there might be reasons that they don't get their work done. There might be reasons that they are struggling. For example, I once discovered one of my families here didn't have electricity. That child would not have told me that if we weren't talking every day.
>
> If you keep talking to your kids, they will share more with you so that you will know more about them. It's not just about science, social studies, math, and language arts; it's their life. If they are having trouble at home, they can't learn.

Beliefs About Teaching

When pondering her beliefs about teaching, Martha compared her work ethic to her teaching philosophy of "try and try again:"

> For some kids, it's going to take one time of hearing something and seeing it. For other kids, even when they leave you, they still won't have it done. My philosophy is just to keep on keeping on with a lot of these kids. A lot of the kids don't get the support at home that they need, so I do my best for all of them. Some of them are going to need more help than others, so try and try again.

In order to make sure that the academic needs of her students are met, Martha indicated that she observes her students and analyzes pertinent assessment data. When students have personal needs that interfere with the quality of their assigned work, Martha engages in conversations with her students to determine how she can help them with their personal needs that could include hunger, fatigue, or family support. Further, Martha conveyed that the most important teachings that she can impress upon her students include time management, attentive listening, and mutual respect.

When thinking about expectations for her students, Martha declared that she holds the same standards for all of her students, even if their academic, social, and economic backgrounds differ. Martha indicated that she has to hold high expectations for African American students regarding discipline:

> I have to state my expectations. They always do well with that. All kids do really. One thing that I've found with my African American students is that when I get their parents involved or get mom on the phone, that usually takes care of it. Usually their moms and dads don't allow their kids to be disrespectful to the teacher. . . . Parent involvement immediately takes care of it.
>
> It's been a learning experience teaching African American kids because they are just like everybody else. The kids just want to be cared for and praised. I've always felt like they are like everybody else, but there are a few differences,

especially with discipline. They have been some of my best kids, but they have also been some of my most challenging kids.

Academic Accountability

Even though Martha discussed the difficulty in not using TAKS objectives to assess her students, she indicated that she often connects students' home environments to lesson objectives:

> We do daily assessments. It's kind of hard to break away from the whole TAKS assessment, so even a lot of the homework that goes home is based on those objectives. We have a program called *Investigations*, and it really ties in their family. If we are measuring in the classroom, they are measuring their families' feet, or they are measuring the distance between the refrigerator and the couch. I will ask them to look at the receipt and round the numbers when they go to the grocery store.

When reflecting upon how she closes the achievement gap, Martha shared her teaching practices and her beliefs about standardized testing:

> The achievement gap is based on our standardized tests, so there would have to be a different kind of assessment first of all. I think that's the first step. You can't have all these different children from different backgrounds with different socioeconomic levels take the same test. I think that's where the gap is coming from. They are so different, yet you are testing them the same way.
>
> I feel like some of my minority children are not going to do as well because of the experiences they have had, and it's through no fault of their own. It's just different experiences. They are being raised differently. There are so many pressures on these kids, and they test for four or five hours that day at least. They are eight years old, and they are having to sit there for that long which is already against their nature. They can't sit for that long and neither can I. I don't agree with it.
>
> I have some smart children that just can't take tests. First of all, we need to do away with the standardized tests and find a different way to assess the kids. If I do anything before I stop teaching, it's going to be to just make parents more aware of how important their involvement is and not just when their kid enters kindergarten but from when they are babies.

Teacher Preparation

University Coursework. When Martha attended the undergraduate elementary teacher preparation program at the highly selective public university in Texas chosen for this study, she took one class prior to completing the program in 1999 that focused on socioeconomic differences. Martha thought that the professor did a wonderful job in presenting the content to the class:

> We talked about different cultures. He would send us to different parts of the city. He would send us outside of the city for different projects to take pictures and just observe. We are rarely given the chance to just sit and observe. He knew so much about every different culture. It was just seeping; we just took it all in. That was the only class.

Although Martha took one class that focused on various cultures, Martha asserted that the class did not prepare her as well as her actual classroom experience:

> I don't think any class really will prepare you for what you are up against when you come into the classroom. . . . I went through the program, but it is no where near what is really happening in the classroom. A lot of times the textbooks you read are like idealistic versions of what the classroom is going to be like, and every year it's different, so there's no way to put that in a class.

Field Experiences. During her field experiences in the teacher preparation program, Martha spent one semester observing and one semester of teaching at a school with a student population that was approximately 40% African American, 40% Hispanic, and 20% White. Approximately 80% of the students had a low socioeconomic status.

According to Martha, the most important component of her teacher preparation program involved her student teaching assignment:

> I purposely decided that I wanted to student teach at that school. . . . They placed me with a very competent teacher. She was wonderful. I learned a lot from her. She said a lot of teachers leave within the first five years, and it's not the students that are going to make you leave. It's going to be the adults that make you leave. I understand her now. They force you to sit there for an entire semester at the back of the classroom and take notes. The amount of time that they allowed us to be in there helped also.

Contributions to Success

Martha attributed her effectiveness with African America students to having the same expectations for all of her students:

> I have the same standards for them no matter what, even if they have a low socioeconomic status or are in special education. I have the same standards for all of my kids, and I expect the same things from them. I tell them that I will help you with whatever I can outside of school, but when you are with me, you are going to do what everybody else is doing. In the real world, you are going to be expected to do what everybody else is doing. I think just holding them to the same standards as all of my other students has been very effective.

According to Martha, knowing more about her African American students' cultural backgrounds would have been more helpful in preparing her to be successful with African American students:

> I still feel like I don't know enough. The longer I teach the more connected I feel, especially with the parents because the children are so loving. It doesn't matter to them, but sometimes with the parents I feel like I need to be more aware of what they are going through and what their beliefs are to be able to relate more with them.

As she pondered the role of the campus administration in the students' achievement, Martha expressed her belief that the administrators' role is to provide the "tools for learning and the best curriculum to meet the needs of their learning." In Martha's opinion, "We all are born with that innate ability to learn." Therefore, Martha conveyed that the school's role in students' achievement is to motivate them and to

provide them with the tools to be successful in the learning that is ultimately their responsibility.

Since she has been teaching, Martha indicated that persistence and setting clear expectations has helped her to become more successful with African American students.

> I do find that I have to be very, very stern, and I've observed the parents, too. My expectations have to be very clear with my African American students, and if I set those expectations high enough, they will reach them. I've observed the parents, and their parents don't take any back talk. They don't take any from their kids. They keep their kids in line. I'm going to do the same thing, and it works.

University Profile

The public university selected for this study is located in central Texas and is regarded as highly selective due to its national ranking reported as "more selective" by the U.S. News & World Report (2006). U.S. News & World Report designates higher education institutions as "most selective," "more selective," "selective," "less selective," or "least selective," based on a formula that accounts for enrollees' test scores, class standing, and the percentage of the school's applicants who are accepted. With 39,000 undergraduate students and 11,000 graduate students, this university awards 12,000 degrees annually.

Undergraduate Elementary Teacher Preparation Program

Accredited through NCATE, the undergraduate elementary teacher preparation program at the highly selective public university in Texas currently offers a Bachelor of Science in Applied Learning and Development for prospective elementary school teachers. The area of teacher certification is Early Childhood to Fourth Grade Generalist

with 130 semester hours. In addition, prospective teachers who aspire to teach fifth grade must acquire certification for middle grades, which will qualify them to teach fourth grade through eighth grade.

In order to qualify for the elementary teacher preparation program, candidates must complete basic education requirements, have a minimum 2.5 GPA on all coursework taken at the university, and 15 hours of prerequisite coursework. The prerequisite coursework includes the following:

1. Foundations of Arithmetic
2. Children's Movement
3. Individual Differences
4. Two courses from the area of Applied Learning and Development that include Child Development and Lab; Child Psychology, Cognition, Human Learning, and Motivation; Play in Early Childhood Development; Literacy Acquisition; Second Language Acquisition; Psychology of Reading, and Sociocultural Influences on Learning

In addition to a curricular specialization, prospective teachers who are majoring in applied learning and development must complete the following:

1. Three semester hours in human development chosen from Human Development or Family Sciences and Psychology
2. Three semester hours in cognition and learning chosen from Cognition, Human Learning, and Motivation or Play in Early Childhood Development
3. Individual Differences
4. Three semester hours in the development and learning of language and literacy chosen from Literacy Acquisition, Second Language Acquisition, or Psychology of Learning
5. Sociocultural Influences on Learning

6. Applied Human Learning

Prospective teachers pursuing a bachelor's degree in applied learning and development must complete a professional development sequence and have 15 semester hours in a minor. The professional development sequence consists of 3 semesters. The first semester includes 12 hours of coursework, as well as an internship in a pre-kindergarten or kindergarten classroom for approximately 12 to 14 hours per week. The second semester includes 12 hours of coursework and an internship in a first, second, third, or fourth grade classroom for 16 hours. The final practicum, consisting of apprentice or student teaching, is worth 12 semester hours of coursework, and prospective teachers are at their assigned campuses Monday through Friday from 7:30 A.M. until 3:30 P.M. The coursework within the professional development sequence includes the following:

1. Applied Human Learning
2. Elementary Language Arts Methods
3. Guiding Young Children in Groups
4. Elementary Social Studies Methods
5. School Organization and Classroom Management
6. Elementary Science Methods
7. Elementary Mathematics Methods
8. Addressing Reading Difficulties
9. Elementary Grade Teaching Practicum

As a part of the teacher preparation program, students must also have successful completion of oral and written proficiency exams. Students must maintain a minimum grade of "C" or a minimum 2.5 cumulative grade point average. In addition, students will not be certified teachers until they have passed the state-required TExES examinations.

Since one aim of this study was to examine the multicultural education training component that exists within the teacher preparation program at the highly selective public university chosen for this study, two courses were identified that had themes of multiculturalism and diversity in their course descriptions: Sociocultural Influences on Learning and Individual Differences.

Sociocultural Influences on Learning, a course required for all prospective teachers pursuing a bachelor's degree in applied learning and development, has themes of multiculturalism. The course consists of 3 lecture hours and 3 laboratory hours a week for one semester. According to the course description, Sociocultural Influences on Learning consists of the following content: (a) human learning in multisocial, multilingual, and multicultural contexts; (b) realities of society and their impact on learning; and (c) social concerns such as prejudice, stereotyping, cross-cultural attitudes, bilingual issues, and parent and community involvement.

Individual Differences is a course that examines areas of exceptionality within the context of typical development through the life span. One of the topics in this course explores cultural and linguistic diversity as it applies to exceptionality. This course

consists of 3 lectures hours a week for one semester with field experiences that are arranged by the instructor.

Profiles of University Faculty

Two university faculty members were interviewed regarding the undergraduate elementary teacher preparation program at the university and the evolution of the multicultural education training component. In addition to each faculty members' professional background, common themes that emerged from the interviews will be provided: (a) multicultural education, (b) focusing on African American students, (c) field-based opportunities, and (d) next steps.

Dr. Frank Daniels

Professional Background

Dr. Frank Daniels and the researcher met in his office during the month of February to conduct the interview. For 37 years, Dr. Daniels, a white male in his mid 60's, has been a professor at the highly selective public university in Texas. Currently, Dr. Daniels coordinates and teaches Sociocultural Influences on Learning, a course associated with the undergraduate elementary teacher preparation program at the university. Other courses that Dr. Daniels teaches include Anthropology of Education, Ethnographic Field Methods, and Race and Ethnic Relations.

Multicultural Education

According to Dr. Daniels, the undergraduate elementary teacher preparation program has shown some signs of evolution in its emphasis on multicultural education since the early 1970's when he became a professor at the university. In the early 1970's,

students in the elementary teacher preparation program had the opportunity to take a Mexican American Studies course or an African American Studies course. However, the courses were not associated with the teacher preparation program or education. Devoted to diversity, Dr. Daniels and a colleague advocated a course in multicultural education. In 1985 the university began to require Sociocultural Influences on Learning, a course that Dr. Daniels currently coordinates and teaches. Dr. Daniels has been driven by a need to recruit diverse staff members to teach the course:

> As the coordinator of this, I've tried to work hard to recruit diverse faculty and get them involved in this course because I personally feel real strongly that you need a culturally diverse faculty to teach courses about the culturally diverse, although maybe some whites can do that. It shouldn't be a thing where whites are teaching about this topic period, and you don't have faculty of color also working on it. Seven out of the nine faculty that teach this course now are faculty of color, and that's a dramatic change from when I first came to this university.

To allow for autonomy, the structure, readings, and requirements vary for each professor who teaches Sociocultural Influences on Learning. The nine professors who teach this course have the freedom to create their own syllabus so that the strengths of the individual faculty members are emphasized:

> Everybody has the freedom to do the course any way they would like to within a certain framework. We need to address diversity issues and equity issues, but we've tried to organize it so that the strengths of different faculty can be emphasized. We don't expect every course to look exactly the same. We do expect people to challenge the students about their own views of diversity and equity, and we expect them to try to give the students readings and field experiences that make them reflect on their own lack of knowledge about this area and motivate them to learn more and be self-critical about their own background and approaches. How a faculty does that in particular depends upon how they want to do it. There are broad goals that the course must do and offer some good background on history and culture of key groups, primarily Latino and African American, but there's no rigid formula for how people should teach the course. Everyone is free to teach it how they would like to.

As Dr. Daniels reflected about the progress that the university has made by implementing this course, he commented on the length of time that it took to implement Sociocultural Influences on Learning:

> Literally because of the relative indifference of this university, for whatever reason, it took us 14 years to get the college to actually officially create a course. The course that they created was Sociocultural Foundations of Learning, where issues of diversity and equity were to be seriously addressed. Then they also created this other optional course of language acquisition which gets into a lot of issues of language and inequality and effects of deficit thinking that people have about language differences.
>
> Ebonics is a real language and bilingual kids have special problems and all this stuff that everyone that works in diversity knows, but the average person doesn't think about. The language and culture issue is another important part of that, so we've got quite a few students now taking a course that makes them more sophisticated about issues of language as well as issues of culture and politics of school finance and all that stuff. That gets put in the mid 80's, and it's pretty much still intact or evolved in certain ways. That was not easy to get in the state of Texas. It was difficult to get because of general apathy towards these issues.

One of the biggest improvements that Dr. Daniels identified was the implementation of more field-based opportunities for students to be exposed to diverse communities and populations. Prospective elementary teachers self-select to be in the teacher preparation program and participate in a cohort program that consists of required courses. The courses that students are required to take always have 20% to 30% diversity enrollment because they are usually cross-listed with African American Studies or Mexican American Studies. The section that Dr. Daniels teaches on Sociocultural Influences on Learning incorporates service learning, field experiences, and a reflective essay.

Focusing on African American Students

When reflecting about a focus on specific strategies for African American students, Dr. Daniels responded that the university has not focused on specific strategies that work for particular groups of students:

> I don't think the group kind of only feels like there are particular strategies that only work for African American or Mexican American or Asian American students. I think that there's an attempt to teach a philosophy of culturally relevant teaching, and there are key authors. There are multicultural educators. We use those materials, so the general approach to be more conscious and aware of these issues and aware of the equity issues is there, but I don't think anybody thinks there is a particular methodology that works best for any particular ethnic or racial group.
>
> All kids respond to respect, etcetera. I think there's no precise method that anybody is trying to teach. There are certain general attitudes and certain values and philosophy that I think everybody tries to teach, but I don't think it's real specific about techniques or whatever.

Field-Based Opportunities

Dr. Daniels identified that the biggest improvement among the changes at the university has occurred with the field-based opportunities. Among their field-based opportunities, students experience service learning, tutoring, community organizations, and a year-long student teaching assignment. Even though many of the professors feel as though the number of opportunities could be higher, Dr. Daniels remarked, "It takes a huge commitment of faculty time to supervise that sort of thing. . . . The pressure on the faculty is tremendous to do a lot of work at the university." Further, Dr. Daniels held that more graduate assistants could help them design better field-based experiences for the prospective teachers to make them "realize more what they lack in terms of knowledge of other cultures:"

> To turn loose a lot of undergraduates in communities and families of people of modest income is a tricky thing to do. You have to have people to help guide them. You can't just send them out to the community to do stuff without some previous structure and without some previous monitoring because they are inexperienced, they are scared, and they are unsure of themselves. You can't. You have to have a well-structured program. I think we do that pretty well within the tutoring program and within some service learning experiences, but we're reluctant to just really jump in totally without a little more help.

A year-long student teaching assignment is required for all prospective teachers at the university. The students can go all over the city for their assignments. Although Dr. Daniels does not place students at their student teaching locations, he believes that the majority of the students complete their assignments at lower income schools "which are now resegregated and are predominantly Mexican American or African American or Mexican American and African American."

For community engagement, the students work in various types of organizations with focus areas that include environmental issues, social welfare situations, parental concerns, and drug abuse issues:

> You also don't want to send people out into social problem areas and reinforce stereotypes they already have about groups by having them work only with problem groups and look to working in community groups that are doing real constructive stuff. I think the emphasis is to find programs where the students can participate with ongoing community activities that are pretty positive in character so they can see that these communities are working hard to solve their own problems, and they can assist them. There are more attempts to find that than there would be to work with battered women or drug addicts or something like that where you might get stereotyping.
>
> We're always looking for more community-oriented projects where we get the students out of the schools and get them into community projects where they can see the community doing stuff for themselves. That would be the theory behind it. That becomes a little more difficult to organize because, again, you can't just throw people out in the community and make up some structured way that these undergraduates can have an experience that's positive. Otherwise, they will be coming back with more negative attitudes,

> which is not what we want. We're working on that. We need a little bit more resources to do that really well.

Next Steps

At the end of the interview, Dr. Daniels reflected upon the development that the university still needs for a more effective undergraduate elementary teacher preparation program. In Dr. Daniels' opinion, the university needs to develop its community service learning through the help of individuals such as teacher assistants or staff members who are devoted to this portion of the program. University faculty who are trying to achieve tenure or maintain expected research objectives do not have the time available to devote more time to facilitating more guidance for prospective teachers in the area of field-based opportunities.

As an anthropologist, Dr. Daniels wants students to understand their communities and families instead of simply being "narrow technicians" who are "pouring information into the heads of kids." Further, Dr. Daniels commented that the surrounding large urban school district could be more progressive in this area because the district "does not encourage their teachers to really do a lot of home visits and really know the community very well." He also noted that the practicing teachers do not live in the communities where they teach, so "there's a pretty big disconnect here between teachers and the communities they serve in a lot of ways."

Dr. Sandra Adams

Professional Background

The researcher met with Dr. Sandra Adams in her office during the month of February to conduct the interview. Dr. Adams, an African American woman in her mid 40's, has been a professor at the highly selective public university for 10 years and has been working in the field of education for the past 20 years. For approximately 5 years, Dr. Adams has served as the undergraduate advisor for the department of special education. In addition, she has served on a number of teacher education committees at the undergraduate level, the master's level, and the doctoral level. When discussing her research interests, Dr. Adams remarked, "My dissertation actually focused on African Americans and their decisions to become teachers, and I focused on preservice teachers who were attending primarily historically black colleges at that time."

Further, for the past 20 years, Dr. Adams has worked on a variety of grants and recruitment projects that focused on "diversity of multiculturalism." Her very first job in 1987 was as project coordinator of a federally-funded grant that looked at recruitment and retention of African American teachers. Within the undergraduate elementary teacher preparation program at the university chosen for this study, Dr. Adams teaches a course called Sociocultural Influences on Learning. She also teaches two doctoral level classes: Sociocultural Foundations in Special Education and Personnel Preparation in Multicultural Special Education.

Multicultural Education

As one of the professors who teaches Sociocultural Influences on Learning, Dr. Adams has the flexibility to devise her own syllabus and select her own topics of focus. Therefore, as a professor in the special education department, she addresses disability and diversity and the intersection between the two with the prospective teachers in her class:

> I think that's been one of the limitations really of multicultural education and special education, in that when you look at the people who focus on multiculturalism, they often don't understand the need to really think about disability and the misunderstandings about disability.
>
> I would think that a more holistic approach to preparing teachers today would have to look at what is happening in general education, multicultural education, and special education because there are so many students who are from diverse cultures that are affected by special education. It's often because people don't really understand diversity and multicultural education, so a lot of those kids often are identified as disabled when it's really differences. Those differences aren't being addressed appropriately, so the children are subsequently identified as having a disability.

Field-Based Opportunities

Although Dr Adams does not incorporate field-based experiences in her section of Sociocultural Influences on Learning, she mentioned that when students are in their first semester of the cohort program, they take another course in which field-based experiences are incorporated as a part of four foundational courses. Within this field-based experience, the students have the opportunity to attend a 12 hour block in which they go into 8 different types of educational settings that include children with disabilities across a wide range of disabilities.

In addition, they are able to see how all of these different factors have implications for becoming special education teachers. The other foundational courses focus on topics such as individual differences and issues in special education. The special education department is "trying to do away with that one course, one shot deal where you take a multicultural class and then nobody talks about it ever again."

Focusing on African American Students

Dr. Adams shared her reflections on instructional strategies and how they pertain to African American students:

> I think that when we talk about research-based instruction, the idea behind research-based instruction is that we are going into various settings, we are testing these strategies across multiple populations, and we are trying to ascertain the extent to which different kids are responding to the strategies and to the teaching techniques. I'm not quite sure yet where I come down on the extent to which culture influences the degree to which a student responds.
>
> I know that there are differences, but I don't know if it's so much cognitively as it is emotionally and psychologically. There are a lot of things going on that we probably don't ever think about in terms of why a student might respond to a certain intervention in one way compared to how another student might respond to the same intervention the same way. But I think to discount that there is some influence is inherently flawed in our thinking.

Dr. Adams' belief is that people "are really erring" when they say that culture does not matter or that people learn the same way. When discussing research related to cultures and groups, Dr. Adams remarked that research-based practice means that theory and interventions are being tested across multiple groups to see how children are performing. Further, Dr. Adams cautioned that researchers must be careful when analyzing group responses. She held that differences exist within groups, and to make blanket statements about how everyone in the group should respond is problematic:

> I can't think of one African American in America who has probably not experienced some form of oppression. If they haven't directly, they are aware of communities or individuals who have. That's got to have a psychological affect on a lot of students and to discount that as if it's not important, I think that's problematic, and any teacher who does not have that recognition probably would go in and have a great intervention or great strategy.
>
> If she doesn't recognize that, then she may think that this is a kid who can't learn, and maybe this kid is resistant to learning because operating in his head are some things that really don't have anything to do with the intervention itself. Because you don't understand that, then you are concluding that he cannot do this task or that this is not a good intervention for that child, so that's probably one of the reasons that you keep pressing and pushing this notion of diversity.

Dr. Adams' prospective teachers learn in her class that they come in with prejudices and biases just as the students do. With a medical analogy referencing how people with the same condition might not respond favorably to the same prescribed medication, Dr. Adams described how people view the same set of circumstances through different lenses:

> I'll give you an example of that. I have high blood pressure, and I went into my doctor's office and just trying all kinds of things. It wasn't really regulating it. One day I went in, and I just asked. I don't know what made me ask, but I asked my doctor, "Can I see the clinical trials? Who have they included in these clinical trials?" He responded, "What does that matter, I'm the doctor?" I said, "I want to see reports of the medications that you are giving me, and I want to know who has been included in the clinical trials." He provided the report for me, and I read it. I said, "You know what is interesting is that there have not been any African American females ever included in trials for high blood pressure medications. All you are doing basically is hitting and missing, trial and error, hoping that you hit one that I'm going to respond to favorably, but you really don't know."

Dr. Adams related this personal example to the guessing that occurs with children in the classroom due to the unanswered questions and the many variables that have not been thoroughly examined or considered when research is conducted. Subsequently, Dr. Adams proclaimed, "A lot of culturally and linguistically diverse kids

have not been included in the studies, so it's really not fair to compare a child who has not been included to children who have been included."

Next Steps

The special education department at the university has been restructuring its elementary teacher preparation program to weave multiculturalism throughout the courses instead of in just one course. Further, an evaluation component has been devised to follow through on implementation and to examine prospective teachers' perceptions of the program:

> I can't say how successful it is yet because we just put it into place two years ago, and we are trying to now look at program evaluation and really assess what we've done. We've begun to collect some exit data to get a sense of how effective the students think the program is and how well prepared they feel. We are looking at issues of preparedness and their perceptions of their preparedness to work in diverse settings with diverse populations.

According to Dr. Adams, the special education department at the university is rallying for a progressive movement towards inclusion and diligently trying to define what diversity means in the university's college of education as it relates to preparing future teachers. To Dr. Adams, when thinking about diversity and inclusiveness, educators must think about "all of the possible groups of learners that might fall under this umbrella called diversity." Thus, comprised in 2003 of at least five departments in the university's college of education, the teacher education committee has developed a mission statement that conveys the attempt to prepare teachers for the future.

One of the reasons that the teacher education committee was formed is that professors were hearing from the community that while their teacher graduates were

proficient at teaching, they were not so skilled at working with diverse groups. Research is in progress to address reform in the university's teacher preparation programs. Pleased with the increasing willingness of faculty members to serve on the teacher education committee, Dr. Adams recalled devising objectives that involve the need to have more professional development among the faculty to equip them to design their coursework and the field-based experiences in ways that will give the teachers that direct contact and exposure to diverse students and diverse communities. From Dr. Adams' perspective, the university's college of education is "moving just beyond mere rhetoric" to either "put up or shut up" when making decisions about reform in the area of teacher preparation.

Because teacher graduates are coming back and voicing their discontent with their preparedness to teach diverse students, Dr. Adams proclaimed, "I think over time we are going to see more and more faculty members just out of sheer necessity having to rethink and reconceptualize how they go about training teachers." Further, Dr. Adams held that not only will the college of education look at diversity in terms of sociocultural issues, but it will also look at diversity in terms of different learning styles and different learning needs because "teachers were falling short" on both areas. When she pondered what it means for a teacher to be highly qualified, Dr. Adams remarked, "What I write about now is that I don't believe the teacher is highly qualified just by virtue of passing the exit exam" because prospective teachers can "do exceptionally well on that exam and still not really be qualified to deal with the complexities of the classroom today."

For Dr. Adams, highly qualified includes cultural competence and adeptness with disability:

> It may not have implications for the teacher that goes into the suburban school or into the affluent neighborhood school, but the reality is that is not where the majority of our teachers begin. They begin in highly diverse school settings, and those people who look at attrition literature know that these teachers are burning out within the first two or three years. My thought is that it's happening because they leave with the ideal version of what teaching is going to be like, and then reality sets in about two or three hours into their first appointment. They never told us this! If they taught them, they gave them such a flawed understanding of what diversity was that. . . . now they are confronted with the realization that these kids are not like what you all said they were.

Because prospective teachers are presented with strategies that will work for some populations and not others, Dr. Adams even believes that some professors send students out with a bias toward students who are poor or who are culturally and linguistically diverse. According to Dr. Adams, teacher candidates leave the university with a "very skewed understanding about which kids are likely to respond to certain kinds of teaching techniques." Further, Dr. Adams shared her perception of how a teacher preparation program can ineffectively address diverse student populations:

> That will happen if you have these one course add ons and classes where you talk about good teaching, and then you have one lecture in the semester that . . . talks about the culturally and linguistically diverse kids as if to say there is something inherently different or wrong about the kids so what we are teaching you, throw that out the window when you have to deal with this population of kids.

An effective teacher to Dr. Adams is one who can teach all children if armed with accurate information about children instead of just a repertoire of techniques. In Dr. Adams' opinion, the university is setting prospective teachers up for failure if they do not prepare them well. She feared that some of the really bright students get placed in

some of the most challenging schools, only to begin thinking about how soon they can get transferred to schools in which they believe they can be successful with the student population. Consequently, Dr. Adams has found that "we end up losing what I think are eager, energetic, and competent teachers who lose all of that very quickly."

Conclusion

The main purpose of Chapter 4 was to report the data collected from the 10 participants who were nominated by their principals for this study as effective elementary school teachers of African American students. Further, Academic Excellence and Indicator System (AEIS) reports provided by the Texas Education Agency (TEA) from the 2005-2006 school year were used to supplement information given by principals and teachers. Tables that span no more than three areas of prior assessment data are presented for some of the teachers according to their areas of teaching responsibility. Only applicable data available from the large urban school district could be reported. As the data was analyzed, common themes emerged for all teacher participants that included the following: (a) perceptions of culture, (b) beliefs about teaching, (c) academic accountability, (d) teacher preparation, and (e) contributions to success.

In addition to data collected pertaining to the elementary school teachers whose principals nominated them for this study, profiles and reporting of the data were given for the highly selective public university in Texas, the elementary teacher preparation program, and the university faculty.

Chapter 5 will present an analysis of the data, interpretations of the emergent themes, offer recommendations for reform in teacher preparation, practice, and educational policy.

CHAPTER 5: DATA ANALYSIS, INTERPRETATIONS, AND CONCLUSIONS

In this chapter, an analysis of the data and interpretation of emergent themes will be presented for the 10 elementary school teachers and the undergraduate elementary teacher preparation program at the highly selective public university in Texas. First, a brief introduction will be provided that describes the 10 elementary school teachers and why the teachers were nominated by their principals. Second, a description of Ladson-Billings' (1995a) theoretical framework of culturally relevant pedagogy will be provided, along with its role in data analysis and interpretation of the emergent themes. Third, an analysis of data collected from teachers and university faculty will be presented for each emergent theme followed by an interpretation of each emergent theme. As the data is analyzed, attention will be given to the following research questions that the data address:

1. What are teachers' perceptions of their effectiveness with African American students in a large urban school district?

2. What are the teachers' perceptions of the preservice preparation that assisted them in their effectiveness with African American students?

3. What other components do the teachers identify that contributed to their effectiveness with African American students?

4. To what extent are the teachers' beliefs about teaching consistent with the components of culturally relevant pedagogy?

Finally, after the data is analyzed, recommendations will be presented prior to limitations of the research, areas of further research, and conclusions.

Participants

This was an interpretive qualitative study (Merriam, 2002) of 10 elementary school teachers who were nominated by their principals as effective teachers of African American students. The main purpose of this study was to analyze the perceptions and beliefs of these 10 teachers regarding their effectiveness with African American students. The selection of the participants was purposive. By speaking with these teachers, it was the researcher's hope and intent to identify the common attributes and characteristics of teachers who are effective with African American students. Commonalities existed among the 5 elementary school principals who nominated teachers on their various campuses. All 5 principals indicated that the teachers they nominated engaged in best teaching practices, held high expectations for their students, focused on academic accountability, practiced building relationships with students and parents, and utilized administrative support to assist in facilitating successful outcomes for their students.

Each of the participants articulated their perceptions in their unique ways. Their approach varied, but student success was a primary objective for all teachers. Although their perceptions regarding culture, teaching expectations for students, academic accountability, preparatory experiences, and contributions to success often differed, several commonalities were evident in their beliefs. The similarities and differences are reflected in the themes that emerged from the data.

Theoretical Framework

The main purpose of this study was to analyze the perceptions of teachers nominated by their principals as effective teachers of African American students. The selection of the participants was purposive, and the cultural differences between the participants and their students were a primary phenomenon of interest in this study.

The literature that was reviewed for this study was consistent in noting that minority students tended to be more successful in schools that acknowledged their cultural backgrounds. This persistent theme throughout the literature was consistent with Ladson-Billings' (1995a, 2001) theoretical framework of culturally relevant pedagogy. Thus, to make meaning of the teachers' perceptions, the immense amount of data collected from the teachers was analyzed through the lens of Ladson-Billings' (1995a, 2001) theoretical framework of culturally relevant pedagogy. Although the main vehicle for analyzing data in this study is basic interpretive qualitative research (Merriam, 2002), the theoretical framework of culturally relevant pedagogy requires a critical approach in the data analysis.

Since data analysis is an ongoing process, the researcher began to analyze the data during initial interviews and continued in all subsequent interviews. In qualitative research, data analysis is open ended and inductive with no distinct point at which data collection begins and analysis begins (Guba & Lincoln, 1985). In addition, the data collected in this study overlapped throughout the emergent themes.

As the data were analyzed, it was apparent that the majority of the teachers did not possess all three criteria of Ladson-Billings' (1995a, 2001) theoretical framework of

culturally relevant pedagogy. According to Ladson-Billings, teachers are culturally relevant if they embody the following three criteria: (a) an ability to develop students academically; (b) a willingness to nurture and support cultural competence; and (c) the development of a sociopolitical or critical consciousness. All of the teachers expressed an ability to develop students academically by being skillful with curriculum and using data to implement strategies that address students' individual needs. Several of the teachers indicated that they have a willingness to nurture and support cultural competence; however, some of the teachers did not clearly acknowledge cultural biases and prejudices or reach all of the indicators that determine cultural competence. Very few teachers indicated that they fostered the development of a sociopolitical or critical consciousness.

Data Analysis of Emergent Themes with Teacher Participants

Five common themes emerged from the data: (a) perceptions of culture, (b) beliefs about teaching, (c) academic accountability, (d) teacher preparation, and (e) contributions to success. These emergent themes were used to organize the data for the purpose of data analysis and interpretation. As the data were analyzed, subthemes became apparent and are presented with the emergent themes. It was also apparent that certain content within the emergent themes overlapped with other themes. The commonalities and differences present in the teachers' perceptions are reported using a descriptive narrative approach.

Perceptions of Culture

Since this study involved analyzing teachers' perceptions regarding their effectiveness with African American students, teachers' perceptions of culture emerged as one of the most prevailing themes across all data collected from the participants. The teachers attempted to put forth an ongoing effort to understand the students' cultural backgrounds at various levels and used that knowledge to assist in facilitating successful outcomes. Although some of the principals who nominated the teachers talked about how the teachers used student interest to engage them in learning, none of the principals nominated teachers because they were skillful in understanding students' cultural backgrounds to aid in student success.

One of the criteria that Ladson-Billings (1995a, 2001) found common among culturally relevant teachers involved the teachers' willingness to nurture and support cultural competence. Although several of the teachers indicated that they have a willingness to nurture and support cultural competence, some of the teachers did not clearly acknowledge cultural differences or reach all four of the indicators that determine cultural competence. According to Ladson-Billings, the four indicators of cultural competence are as follows:

1. The teacher understands culture and its role in education.
2. The teacher takes responsibility for learning about students' culture and community.
3. The teacher uses student culture as a basis for learning.
4. The teacher promotes a flexible use of students' local and global culture.

Although four indicators of sociopolitical consciousness exist, only one of the indicators was evident in the data analysis: The teacher plans and implements academic experiences that connect students to the larger social context.

The data within this emergent theme assist in answering two of the four research questions investigated in this study:

1. What are teachers' perceptions of their effectiveness with African American students in a large urban school district?

2. To what extent are the teachers' beliefs about teaching consistent with the components of culturally relevant pedagogy?

Various subthemes became evident under this main theme of teachers' perceptions of culture. For the purpose of organization, these six subthemes are presented in the following manner: (a) definitions of culture, (b) colorblindness, (c) incorporating culture in the curriculum, (d) poverty, (e) family dynamics, and (f) building relationships.

Definitions of Culture

Within their definitions of culture, most of the teachers focused on the beliefs and experiences that are acquired from family such as religion, food, music, language, and values. Brenda and Gloria were the only teachers who mentioned that culture involves ethnicities. Ladson-Billings (2001) asserted that "culture is a complex concept that affects every aspect of life" (p. 98). Rita defined culture simply as "who you are." However, Rita was reluctant to acknowledge race as a cultural difference among the students in her classroom. Brenda acknowledged that "culture means everything" and had the most comprehensive definition of culture:

> Culture means everything. It's a huge word to me. I think it has to do with not only your race and your ethnicity, but it's also the culture that you are living in. It's what you know, what you've seen, and what you've been taught. It's a huge word to me. I don't even know that I can break it down. It's part of our everyday lives, really and truly.

Understanding culture and its role in education is one of the indicators of cultural competence (Ladson-Billings, 2001). The lack of depth in understanding was a commonality among the majority of the teachers when they talked about culture. Several of the teachers disclosed that they identified cultural differences between their students and themselves such as life experiences, group characteristics, and socioeconomic status. However, only Jennifer clearly acknowledged any cultural biases, even though she is African American like the students in her example and chose teaching because she saw a need to diversify the field:

> I'm African American, and yes, I have told a child or two that you are embarrassing me. I am an African American woman, and you are making me look bad, and you need to stop that. I didn't just say that. I explained what they were doing and how that made us look bad.

Colorblindness

When thinking about cultural differences, some of the teachers rendered notions of colorblind ideology by failing to "see" color. Maria, Gloria, and Rita discussed how they "teach children" and avoid paying attention to their racial backgrounds. Even though Rita expressed how she experienced prejudice attitudes as a biracial Hispanic, Rita was the most adamant about her beliefs when trying to think about the racial backgrounds of her students and said that it would be difficult to do:

> I would have to stop and actually think about each one of my kids and what their ethnicity is, and I don't do that. I teach children. I don't teach a culture, a color, a sex preference. I teach kids.

Ladson-Billings (1994) called this practice of colorblindness "dysconscious racism" which is an "uncritical habit of mind that justifies inequity and exploitation by accepting the existing order of things as given" (p. 31-32). Although Ladson-Billings did not suggest that the teachers were "racist," she asserted that the teachers were not conscious of the ways in which some students are privileged and others are disadvantaged in the classroom. These teachers, therefore, fail to challenge the status quo by accepting the given as the inevitable. The teachers who practiced colorblindness in this study acknowledged that students' educational experiences differ, depending on their socioeconomic status and racial background. However, the teachers wanted to convey that they do not form prejudice attitudes toward their students or hold the belief that they cannot learn at high levels because of their racial backgrounds.

Incorporating Culture in the Curriculum

When teachers were discussing cultural differences, incorporating culture into the curriculum emerged as a subtheme. According to Ladson-Billings (1995a, 2001), possessing cultural competence is one of three criteria that culturally relevant teachers exhibit. All of the teachers demonstrated some level of cultural competence, but the majority of them could be considered in the beginning stages of possessing cultural competence. Three of the four indicators of cultural competence were evident as the teachers discussed how they incorporate culture in the curriculum.

Taking responsibility for learning about students' culture and community is one indicator of cultural competence (Ladson-Billings, 2001). Gloria was the only teacher who discussed how she immerses herself in the school community to learn more about her students:

> The most important way to reach children is to develop an interpersonal connection with them. I'm pretty well knit into the community here. I go to volleyball games. I go to basketball games. I go to my kids' soccer games. I go to parties that parents throw. I think it's really important to try to immerse yourself in the community in which you work.

Using culture as a basis for learning is a second indicator of cultural competence that was consistent among all of the teachers at some level. All of the teachers gave examples of how they incorporate culture into their students' learning. For instance, Rebecca, Cassandra, and Constance considered that using students' names and experiences in their reading selections or assignments was an act of incorporating culture. Brenda expressed that she incorporates students' personal experiences in their lessons to help them understand unfamiliar content or lesson objectives. Rita and Martha discussed how they incorporate history and traditions related to cultural backgrounds into her lessons throughout the year. Constance, Jennifer, Gloria, and Rebecca indicated that they make sure that the students see themselves in the literature that they provide and in the displays in their classrooms.

Promoting a flexible use of students' local and global culture is a third indicator of cultural competence. When culturally relevant teachers exhibit this indicator, they understand that "cultural affiliations are nested and multifaceted, and the cultural categories we use are crude approximations of individuals' cultures" (Ladson-Billings,

2001, p. 100). Culturally relevant teachers do not use a cultural event or activity to represent every member of that culture, assuming cultural affiliations that students do not share. The majority of the teachers did not indicate that they use cultural events or activities to represent every member of a certain culture. Rita was the only teacher who talked about recognizing cultural traditions around the world, but she did not elaborate on her approach. Her commentary was mostly about exposing students to historical backgrounds and cultural traditions:

> I think culture is important. I think you are who you are, and you bring that to the table. If you only have an experience of one culture, you are boring. I'm sorry, but you have nothing to offer. We try to hit as many cultures and holidays around the world as we can such as the Chinese New Year, Mardi Gras, and Lent. November and December is a perfect time for that. That's when a lot of them start saying this is what I am. This is what I want to talk about. . . . Food works. Sharing of the food is really what it's all about. I'm trying.

Although four indicators of sociopolitical consciousness exist, only one of the indicators was evident in the data analysis: The teacher plans and implements academic experiences that connect students to the larger social context. Martha was the only teacher who talked in detail about how she connects students to the larger social context and solicits critical thinking about the plight of other societies:

> Today we spent an hour talking about some kids in Nairobi, Africa, and the struggles they go through. We spent an entire hour, and throughout the entire hour, my kids got so into it, raising their hands, concerned, angry because the females in that country a lot of times aren't encouraged to go to school, and they were angry about that.

Poverty

When thinking about how culture affects the teaching and learning process, several of the teachers discussed how poverty affects students. All of the teachers

recognized that both similarities and differences exist between their students' culture and themselves. For instance, Maria, Gloria, Constance, and Martha all discussed how they hare similarities to their students, for they grew up in low-income households. Rebecca, Brenda, Jennifer, and Cassandra discussed how they recognized differences in their schooling experiences of attending white, middle-class schools and having college as an expectation in their families unlike many of their students who live in poverty. Several of the teachers noted that students' socioeconomic status have a role in their experiences at school. Cassandra, Brenda, Rebecca, and Jennifer all observed that socioeconomic status is a cultural difference that exists between their students and themselves. Maria, for instance, shared how the students "don't have those Leapfrogs, those trips that they take over to camp over the weekend, and these great experiences that they've experienced before they even get to school." Jennifer expressed that poverty seems to be generational at her school among many of the African American students:

> What I have noticed is that there have been more Hispanic, Indian or African families that will actually move in and out of here. They will come in, get their lives together, and move on. African Americans will stay here generation after generation. There, of course, are some Hispanic families like that. There are far more of them that move on to live in a house or to move into an apartment complex as opposed to staying in government housing.

When Cassandra compared the experiences of her two sons at a school where the students are predominantly white and from middle-class backgrounds to her current campus, she discussed the distinct differences in parental involvement, funding, and support services. Cassandra indicated that the parents at her sons' school lobby for what

they think needs to be at the campus, and they contribute donations. From Cassandra's perspective, the difference between the two schools is socioeconomic status:

> I know I've had some fabulous parents that if they weren't working or had the time or money to be available, they would. When you are working two or three jobs and have babies at home with nobody to keep them, it's hard to be available. It breaks my heart when I have a kid with fever, and I can't get a phone that works, or mama won't answer the phone because then she would have to leave work. To me that's economic.

When discussing the concern with the underachievement of African American students, Cassandra, Gloria, Brenda, Martha, and Maria all attributed the achievement gap to the effects of poverty. For instance, Martha discussed her observation with assessment data involving African American students:

> I look at my data that I'm given at the beginning of the year, and it breaks my heart. We have our numbers in front of us of our Anglo students, Hispanic students, and our African American students, and a lot of times our low socioeconomic status numbers are closely tied to our African American numbers. I think that one of my biggest struggles as a teacher is how to remedy that. I can give them everything I have while I'm here, but when they go home, there's not much I can do.

Several of the teachers also mentioned that students lack educational experiences when they enter school. Martha, Jennifer, Brenda, Rita, and Rebecca discussed how they provide experiences for their students at school in order to enrich their learning. Ladson-Billings (2001) asserted that one of the indicators of cultural competence involves using culture as a basis for learning. Further, "culturally relevant teachers understand that learning is facilitated when we capitalize on a learners' prior knowledge" (p. 99). Although several teachers mentioned that they provide experiences to enrich learning, only a few teachers clearly discussed how they use students' prior experiences to acquire

the content and skills required by the curriculum. Rebecca, Cassandra, Brenda, and Constance considered that using students' experiences in their reading selections or assignments was an act of incorporating culture to enhance learning.

Family Dynamics

The majority of the teachers associated family dynamics with culture. Family support for education was a challenge for all of the teachers. Cassandra, Rebecca, and Evette indicated that many of their students seem to lack self-motivation and aspirations to reach higher educational goals. Martha and Evette noted that parents are influential in whether or not students put forth effort at school and complete their homework. For instance, Martha expressed that parents play an important role in whether or not students value education:

> If the culture thinks that education is key and is very important, then it affects my teaching in that it makes it easier because the parents will feel more inclined to help with homework every day and read with their kid every day. More and more I'm finding, especially with my Hispanic and African American kids, that a lot of the parents leave it up to the school to educate their child. It should be a learning experience on weekends, too, and when you go home also.

As one indicator of cultural competence, taking responsibility for learning about students' culture and community is one indicator of cultural competence (Ladson-Billings, 2001). When thinking of positive interactions they have had with parents, several of the teachers spoke highly of the parents who willingly offer support and indicated that they would like more support from the parents who seem reluctant to support their children. Instead of only saying that some parents do not support their students at school and finding the negative aspects of students' home environments,

Cassandra and Rita clearly conveyed how they attempt to understand the family dynamics in their quest to find solutions. For instance, Rita discussed how she provides support for parents so that they can assist their children with homework:

> There are a lot of times that our parents aren't on the level that our fifth graders are on. We appreciate them letting us know that and being honest with us, and we support them. We send home extra books and work. They call. It's fine. That's what it's all about. We are all about doing anything that we can to have parents connect with their children and with their education.

Building Relationships

Building relationships emerged as a subtheme because of its role in understanding students' culture and the dynamics of the school community. Understanding that parents are influential in their students' academic success, Gloria, Brenda, and Martha discussed how they foster positive relationships with parents in order to obtain their support. For instance, Brenda expressed her approach to obtaining parental involvement:

> For the majority of my parents that I've worked with in the past and that I'm working with this year, school is just something you have to do. It's not something that is number one necessarily; it's a requirement. I try to make the parents understand. I try to be very involved with them and share what my goals would be for their child. I've seen both ends of the support at home. I've seen parents who are there all the time, and when they are not there, they have very strict rules enforced.

Several of the teachers focused on the barriers to building relationships with parents. For instance, Constance shared her challenges in building relationships with parents in order to obtain their support:

> Some of the parents from my class think they don't have time to do all that is asked of them or that they don't have a responsibility to the school, but anytime that we can have a positive interaction, we can start to establish a symbiotic

> relationship. Some of the parents I work with had bad experiences themselves at school and try to avoid it to their kids' detriment. That same feeling then comes out in the kids, which is sad at third grade. It's difficult to bring a student back from disliking school. I feel that many of my parents are used to putting up a fight for many things in life, and that isn't always necessary. I try to make good phone calls home just as often as bad ones, but anytime I call, the defenses are already up.

Ladson-Billings' (2001) emphasis on teachers taking responsibility for learning about students' culture and community is evident in Gloria's practice of immersing herself in the students' culture in order to understand more about the students and their families. This is one indicator of cultural competence that would assist teachers in understanding family dynamics and obtaining more support for the students' education from their parents.

All of the teachers indicated that building relationships with students was important to their success in school. Even though the majority of them identified cultural differences, they expressed that the daily interpersonal interactions they have with students are instrumental in learning more about their students and the community. Rebecca, for instance, declared, "I just have always thought that if you are comfortable around the kids, then they are going to be comfortable around you." Martha described one way in which she builds relationships with all of her students in order to help them be more successful in school:

> With the program that we have here at our school, we really encourage community among the staff, the children, and the parents. It's so important for me to know where each kid is coming from because there might be reasons that they don't get their work done. There might be reasons that they are struggling. For example, I once discovered one of my families here didn't have electricity. That child would not have told me that if we weren't talking every day.

> If you keep talking to your kids, they will share more with you so that you will know more about them. It's not just about science, social studies, math, and language arts; it's their life. If they are having trouble at home, they can't learn.

Beliefs About Teaching

Since this study involved analyzing teachers' perceptions regarding their effectiveness with African American students, teachers' beliefs about teaching emerged as a theme across all data collected from the participants. The teachers all expressed an interest in their students' success. All of the principals discussed the commitment to success that the teachers they nominated possess.

Although their personal beliefs about teaching varied, the teachers' commitment to student success is consistent with one of the criteria that Ladson-Billings (1995a, 2001) found common among culturally relevant teachers involving an ability to develop students academically. Of the five indicators of academic achievement, three indicators of academic achievement were clearly evident within this theme regarding all students' capability to be educated; the teachers' ability to delineate what achievement means in the context of the classroom; and the teachers' knowledge of the content, the learner, and how to reach the reach the learner. The other two indicators involving the teacher supporting a critical consciousness toward the curriculum and encouraging academic achievement as a complex conception not amenable to a single, static measurement are more evident in the emergent theme of academic accountability that will be discussed in a subsequent section. One indicator of sociopolitical consciousness was evident within this theme regarding the teacher believing that a student's success has consequences for

his or her own quality of life. The data within this emergent theme assist in answering two of four research questions investigated in this study:

1. What are teachers' perceptions of their effectiveness with African American students in a large urban school district?

2. To what extent are the teachers' beliefs about teaching consistent with the components of culturally relevant pedagogy?

Three subthemes became evident under this main theme of beliefs about teaching. For the purpose of organization, these three subthemes are presented: (a) commitment to successful outcomes, (b) teaching practices, and (c) expectations for students.

Commitment to Successful Outcomes

Both the principals and the students expressed concern regarding student success despite the challenges that individual students might face. For instance, Ms. Marshall, the principal of Thomas Elementary School stated, "I think our main role is making sure that there is a wonderful teacher in the classroom, a teacher who is highly qualified and effective with children in general." All of the principals discussed that the teachers they nominated held high expectations for their students. Further, all of the teachers expressed a commitment to attaining successful outcomes for students. As the first applicable indicator of academic achievement suggests, all of the teachers expressed a belief in the students' capability to be educated. For instance, Maria declared, "All students can learn if you find out what it is they are good at." Jennifer expressed, "I really do believe that all children can learn if they are taught in the way that they need to learn. It's not the same for all children." In addition to saying that her students have to

know that she is "invested in them," Rita proclaimed, "Every child can be successful." Further, Rita said that she was "born to be a teacher" and gave her definition of teaching as an ongoing job:

> It's not a 7:30 to 3:30 job. It's as soon as you wake up until you go to bed job. It's not a three months off in the summer job. It's what am I going to do for the following year to continue to get the scores that we've got and to continue the level that we have and go higher. As far as teaching, it's never ending.

Teaching Practices

All of the teachers exhibited an ability to develop students academically when they discussed their teaching practices. The second applicable indicator of academic achievement regarding the teachers' ability to delineate what achievement means in the context of the classroom was evident in what the teachers expressed about their teaching practices. For instance, Rita shared her method for delineating what achievement means in the context of the classroom that involves providing students with the tools to be successful:

> If you give them the tools, they will be successful. Teach them how to use the tools and how to use their strategies. Use those high level vocabulary words every day because if you don't, then you are never pulling them up; you are never expecting more from them. You are teaching the base line, and that's not going to be survivable for them in the future. They have to know what strategy means. They have to internalize and think.

Although all of the teachers expressed that they want their students to be successful, several of them talked about how their students are excellent in different ways, and the manner in which they are excellent might not be considered academic. Constance, for instance, expressed, "Excellence come in many forms." Further, Constance discussed how her students "define excellence as academics," and as a result,

they do not always feel as though they exhibit excellence. Rita shared her perspective of students achieving excellence at different levels:

> Set your goal. If you reach your goal, reset it. Go higher. If you see that your goal is not realistic or that you aren't going to achieve it, then reset your goal and bring it down. It's okay. Whatever goal you set, that's your excellence. That's you. So we are all excellent, just at different levels.

The third applicable indicator of academic achievement involving the teachers' knowledge of the content, the learner, and how to reach the learner was evident in what the teachers expressed about their teaching practices. The teachers all expressed knowledge of the curriculum, their students' needs, and how to address their students' needs. The teachers were aware of state and district standards; however, several of the teachers talked about assessing for individual growth. As a kindergarten teacher who spends a significant amount of time with repetition and oral language development, Cassandra declared that reading to her students and doing "the same concepts fifty different ways" has helped her students to be more successful. In addition, Brenda discussed how she assesses for student growth:

> A lot of my kids get really down on themselves if they are doing TAKS practice, and they're not as good as everybody else. They've failed the TAKS over and over and over again. I try to take the TAKS out of it, and again, that goes back to my teaching philosophy. If I can show them that from August to December they made progress somewhere and from December to May when they left me they made progress again somewhere, then that's what I consider their excellence.

Expectations for Students

Although the majority of the teachers mentioned the lack of parental support or self-motivation in the students, they did not express that they were barriers to students' capability to be educated. Several of the teachers mentioned that they hold high

expectations for their students or that they hold all of their students to the same standards. Rebecca, one of the teachers, expressed that she holds high expectations for the students, "even though they have things going on in their lives." Rita declared, "I don't care if you are pink or polka dot, you have to do X, Y, and Z to get past me to get to the next grade level, and they do. They rise to that occasion." Further, Rita could not think of one African American student who was not doing well in her class:

> They are all doing well. They don't have an option. It's the way our classroom is run. Everybody is expected to do homework. Everybody is expected to do projects. Everybody is expected to think out of the box. Everybody is expected to produce. To say that one culture needs more help than others, I don't. It's very difficult to see that or say that.

All of the teachers talked about their expectations for discipline in the classroom and how they work with the students to change inappropriate behavior. For instance, if students walk in "with an attitude," Maria expressed that she gives them time and space to calm down. In addition, she allows them to "save face" by giving them the opportunity to make choices:

> You don't challenge. If you challenge the kids, they are going to buck up to you. So you give them as much respect as you can, keep your calm, and that's what throws them off. If you raise your voice right up to them, that's when you lose it. Whatever it is that you try to say, they are going to do it in a bigger tone.

From Jennifer's perspective, how she handles discipline determines whether or not the students are going to have a positive day or a negative day:

> Just today I have a small group of four kiddos. Three of them are boys, and they are all little African American boys. They are a challenge. You just have to pick and choose your battles, and as long as they are not completely disrupting the group, let some things go and just try to keep looking for the positive, the praising.

Some of the teachers even talked about having high expectations with discipline in the classroom. When reflecting upon her belief that a classroom must have a comfortable environment and rules in order for the students to be successful, Rita remarked, "There is a line and every student knows where that line is. When they cross that line, the first thing they have to do is deal with me." Constance expressed that she runs a "tight ship;" however, she holds the belief that discipline does not need to be "public and embarrassing." For Constance, discipline should be not only private, but also "effective and meaningful."

Several of the teachers' statements regarding a commitment to successful outcomes were consistent with an indicator of sociopolitical consciousness regarding the teacher believing that a student's success has consequences for his or her own quality of life. Evette proclaimed, "I look at teaching as an opportunity to not necessarily make students into what I want them to be but just to help them realize their potential and realize with hard work and effort, they can be anything they want to be."

Although the teachers all expressed an interest in their students' success, they had varying perceptions of long-term goals for their students. Some of the teachers mentioned the concern about the lack of future goals that the students have for themselves as a result of their home environments. When thinking about her students' plans for the future, Brenda noted, "A lot of them don't really look towards the future; it's the here and now." Like several other teachers, Evette expressed that she has found that many parents lack the "tools" necessary to help their children succeed:

> It seems to be a cycle with a lot of the families. Maybe mom dropped out of school early or grandma dropped out of school early, and they really don't know where to go or who to talk to and at times feel very insecure in trying to figure out ways to help their child.
>
> Then, on the other hand, I've seen a lot of outside influences. I think a lot of the male students see older brothers and older cousins in the neighborhood doing things, and they say, okay, "Oh, yeah, he's making a lot of money. I need to follow in his footsteps." Not enough positive role models exist. I've seen that a lot, a lot. It's hard to undermine things because that's what they see everyday, and it's hard to kind of steer them in a different direction.

Academic Accountability

Academic accountability emerged as a theme in this study across all participant data. Although the teachers had some dissimilar beliefs regarding standardized testing, they all expressed an interest in the academic success of their students. All of the principals discussed that the teachers they nominated facilitate academic success with their students. Instead of using all five of the indicators of academic achievement found in culturally relevant teachers (Ladson-Billings, 1995a, 2001), the emergent theme of academic accountability was analyzed using three of the most applicable indicators of academic achievement. The indicators involving teachers clearly delineating what achievement means in the context of the classroom and teachers presuming that all students have the capability to be educated were more applicable in the emergent theme that involved teachers' beliefs about teaching and were discussed in that previous section. One of the four indicators of sociopolitical consciousness involving the teacher believing that a student's success has consequences for his or her own quality of life was evident with one teacher. The data within this emergent theme assist in answering two of the four research questions that were investigated in this study:

1. What are teachers' perceptions of their effectiveness with African American students in a large urban school district?

2. To what extent are the teachers' beliefs about teaching consistent with the components of culturally relevant pedagogy?

Two subthemes became evident within the main emergent theme of academic accountability. For the purpose of organization, the two subthemes are presented in the following manner: individualized instruction and beliefs about standardized testing.

Individualized Instruction

All of the teachers are aware of the standards that the state and district hold for their students. While they strive to meet these standards, all of the teachers discussed their use of individualized instruction with their students. In addition to formal assessments, the teachers discussed how they use informal assessments to identify students' needs such as through observations and anecdotal notes. After using data to assess students' needs, the teachers all expressed that their teaching strategies are tailored to meet the individual needs of students. The first applicable indicator of academic achievement involving the teacher knowing the content, the learner, and how to teach content to the learner was evident as all of the teachers talked about how they assess individual growth and use best practices to meet the students' individual needs. For instance, Martha discussed how she incorporates students' home environments to lesson objectives, even though much of the emphasis is on TAKS:

> We do daily assessments. It's kind of hard to break away from the whole TAKS assessment, so even a lot of the homework that goes home is based on those objectives. We have a program called *Investigations*, and it really ties in their family. If we are measuring in the classroom, they are measuring their families' feet, or they are measuring the distance between the refrigerator and the couch. I

will ask them to look at the receipt and round the numbers when they go to the grocery store.

Brenda addressed her multiple approaches in assessing students beyond TAKS and shared how she provides choices in what the students create:

> I try to look at the TEKS from the previous years. For instance, this year a lot of my kids were lacking fourth grade skills, so I took the fourth grade TEKS and lined them up with my fifth grade TEKS. I tried to integrate them as much as possible, so I was teaching fourth and fifth grade TEKS at the same time. That's how I did it this year. I do a lot of after school tutoring, and I try to do that on level for the kids.
>
> I do a lot of observing. I watch the way that they are interacting with each other. I want them to start learning how to speak educationally as well as socially. A lot of times by fifth grade they've got the social part down. They are good at that. It's weaving that educational piece in there.
>
> We use the interactive notebook a lot. . . . It gives them an avenue to create on their own. If they want to draw a picture, if they want to write a rap, and if they want to make charts and graphs of whatever we learned, I try to make it very individualized so that whatever that child is into, that's how they can show me what they are learning through my classes. That's another way that I assess what they are doing. Then there are just your basic daily assessments over lessons. I try to be on top of keeping the learning exciting. It's a necessary evil I guess.

Beliefs About Standardized Testing

Although all 5 principals identified academic success as a characteristic of the teachers they nominated, some of the principals' and teachers' perspectives regarding standardized testing differed. For instance, when asked why Rita, one of the nominated teachers, was effective with African American students, Dr. Lawson, her principal, simply remarked, "It's her scores." Rita was pleased that 100% of the African American students in fifth grade at her campus had passed the reading TAKS. Further, Rita shared that she is so adamant about her students doing well on standardized tests because they will need the experience when they take college entrance examinations. Ms. Malone, the

principal who nominated Jennifer and Evette, remarked that she does not want the enjoyment of learning to be lost to preparing students for standardized tests. As their principals indicated, all of the teachers expressed an ability to develop students academically and met this criterion of culturally relevant pedagogy. TAKS data and district-mandated assessment data served as a measure of success for the teachers.

A second applicable indicator of academic achievement can be applied to this subtheme as the majority of the teachers shared a critical consciousness toward the curriculum. All of the teachers indicated that they use data to drive instruction and to address individual students' needs. However, the majority of them expressed that the results of standardized testing only show passing rates and do not consider the individual progress of students. Several of the teachers also mentioned that the curriculum is stifled by the presence of standardized testing and that they spend a significant amount of time focusing on the test in their classrooms. Rebecca expressed that she uses multiple assessments and realizes that there is "life beyond TAKS." Further, Rebecca has found that not all third grade students who have passed the reading portion of TAKS are proficient readers. Rebecca commented that the TAKS test is only one way to see how students are progressing. With an emphasis on the development of social skills, using several different assessments and classroom observations to obtain a "well-rounded picture" of a student's abilities are strategies that Rebecca suggested as aids in closing the achievement gap.

Evette shared her perspective on how standardized tests stifle other ways of assessing students:

> I feel like there could be better ways for our kids to be assessed, and to have them sit for hours and hours learning strategies is not really learning. You are learning strategies and tricks on how to take a test in order to pass it. I think there are better ways to assess how much they know.

Jennifer expressed her beliefs about how standardized testing interferes with the quality of the curriculum:

> I don't have a problem with standardized testing as long as it doesn't interfere with the quality of education, and currently it interferes with quality education. We teach to the test. It's happening more and more and more across the entire district. I don't care what your socioeconomic status might be. They are doing far more benchmark testing and release TAKS testing and all of that stuff in schools all across the district.
>
> That bothers me after being at that middle-class school and doing such fun interesting, engaging activities that these kids just don't get the chance to do because they are too busy working on the tests. I think there does need to be a measure, and I'm fine with that. Let's not make it impact our daily lives so much.

Despite the changes that the teachers would like to see regarding standardized testing, they are committed to helping their students reach standardized assessment passing standards because they serve as markers of student success. Several of the teachers mentioned that standardized testing does not take into account that students' background experiences differ, especially when they have a low socioeconomic status. However, some of them also expressed an understanding that a measure of what students know should exist. For instance, although Gloria has found that the "test is unfair because it doesn't take into account that some students don't have the background experience that other students have," she also believes that standardized testing "pushes teachers and schools to teach everybody." Gloria also conveyed that "the student learner suffers because a lot of the teachers do just teach to the test."

Martha shared her beliefs about how students' backgrounds and differences are not taken into account when they take standardized tests:

> The achievement gap is based on our standardized tests, so there would have to be a different kind of assessment first of all. I think that's the first step. You can't have all these different children for different backgrounds with different socioeconomic levels take the same test. I think that's where the gap is coming from. They are so different, yet you are testing them the same way.
>
> I feel like some of my minority children are not going to do as well because of the experiences they have had, and it's through no fault of their own. It's just different experiences. They are being raised differently. There are so many pressures on these kids, and they test for four or five hours that day at least. They are eight years old, and they are having to sit there for that long which is already against their nature. They can't sit for that long and neither can I. I don't agree with it.

A third applicable indicator of academic achievement involving the teacher encouraging academic achievement as a complex conception not amenable to a single, static measurement was evident in this subtheme. Although assessment data showed that students either met the specified standards or showed significant growth in student achievement, the majority of the teachers asserted that students' individual academic progress was important to them and that they preferred to see student success determined by the amount of growth that a student has achieved. For instance, Cassandra noted how she uses assessments to assist her in closing the achievement gap that exists for many African American students, but she was reluctant to offer an absolute opinion about standardized testing as a result of her beliefs about assessing for growth:

> I understand how people think we need them. I think we are as an industry way over preoccupied with them. I think they take a whole lot of instructional time. The good answer for that is that it's a pain in the neck. I have a child that I know is probably a drug baby. She was born in jail. She came to me in January. She knew one letter. We're up to 21 now, and she's making progress. You don't see

her on a standardized test. Forget it. I don't think they show where a child came in and what has been accomplished. They don't allow for that.

When thinking about standardized testing, Brenda expressed her suggestions for change:

> I don't like them. I don't think they are fair assessments. I think they put too much stress on the kids. I really think that it should be that they come here in August, and they are tested. When they leave in May, they are tested, and there should be a percentage of increase that you should see with each child. It should be more individualized. If that child has made progress from August to May, then they have done their job and learned. It's kind of wishful thinking.

One of the four indicators of sociopolitical consciousness involving the teacher believing that a student's success has consequences for his or her own quality of life was evident when Brenda shared her beliefs about standardized testing:

> I don't know if this is right or wrong, but I am very real with the kids. I'm honest with them about it. I want them to be aware that it's up to them. It's all back to the reputation and that unfortunate first impression. Oh, the majority of the kids at this school are black or Hispanic. Their grades are going to be low, or the scores are going to be low. I want the kids to be aware of that and say, "No, you aren't going to do that to us. We're going to make a difference."
>
> You have to be aware of that, and you have to be aware that you have to bring those outside life experiences that a lot of kids with two parents in their house are getting. I think that it really and truly takes a better teacher to teach in a school where there are those big gaps. Those kids are going home to a support system that my kids don't have. As a teacher, you have to be aware of that. I think it makes the workload harder, but I also think it's very much more rewarding. That's what I do personally, beyond just making the kids aware that this is your history that you are creating, and you have to try to change it. You have to try to make it better.

Teacher Preparation

Since experiences prior to the first teaching position play an important role in whether or not they are successful with diverse student populations, teacher preparation emerged as a theme in this study across all participant data. Although all of the

participants attended the same highly selective public university in Texas, the teacher preparation program has evolved since Rebecca, the teacher with the most experience, graduated in 1976. The teacher with the least experience graduated from the teacher preparation program in 2004. Therefore, it was anticipated that their experiences would differ. However, there were some commonalities regarding what the teachers were able to remember about their preparatory experiences. Ladson-Billings (2001) asserted teacher preparation programs preparing teachers to work in diverse populations and implement culturally relevant pedagogy should encompass three areas of competency: (a) an ability to develop students academically; (b) a willingness to nurture and support cultural competence; and (c) the development of a sociopolitical or critical consciousness. The emergent theme of teacher preparation was analyzed using the three criteria that Ladson-Billings (1995a, 2001) found common among culturally relevant teachers. The data within this emergent theme assist in answering one of the four research questions investigated in this study: What are the teachers' perceptions of the preservice preparation that assisted them in their effectiveness with African American students? The emergent theme of teacher preparation originally had two subthemes that will be presented in the following manner: university coursework and field experiences.

University Coursework

The majority of the teachers could recall at least one course that focused on some aspect of students' culture. Further, the majority of the teachers conveyed that the course did not prepare them to be successful with African American students in the classroom. Rebecca, the teacher who graduated from the teacher preparation program in 1976,

recalled that courses focusing on diverse student populations were not required as a part of her preparatory coursework. However, she did remember having the choice to take electives that focused on ethnicity within other departments outside of education, but the elective courses were not required. Rita recalled that many of her courses were related to theory instead of practice prior to her graduation in 1980. According to Rita, "Theories are great when they work, but practice is really what you need." Jennifer conveyed that she took a class that focused on multiculturalism, and it was useful in helping her to think about the meaning of culture and the differences between culture, ethnicity, and race.

Martha conveyed that she took one class that focused on socioeconomic differences prior to her graduation in 1999 and thought that the professor did a wonderful job in presenting the content to the class; however, she felt as though classes cannot really prepare students for what they will encounter in the classroom:

> We talked about different cultures. He would send us to different parts of the city. He would send us outside of the city for different projects to take pictures and just observe. We are rarely given the chance to just sit and observe. He knew so much about every different culture. It was just seeping; we just took it all in. That was the only class.
>
> I don't think any class really will prepare you for what you are up against when you come into the classroom. . . . I went through the program, but it is no where near what is really happening in the classroom. A lot of times the textbooks you read are like idealistic versions of what the classroom is going to be like, and every year it's different, so there's no way to put that in a class.

Brenda shared her reflections about her experiences in the teacher preparation program prior to her graduation in 2002:

> The thing that prepared me the most was my first and second year of teaching. I don't think my classes necessarily prepared me for the things I was going to

> experience. I feel like the teacher preparation program at the university is good. I learned how to teach. But it's not real world. It's this is what it's like in a perfect classroom with parents who are there to support you and kids who sit and listen and participate the right way and know how to behave in school. It doesn't prepare you for when you first step into that classroom. The kids don't have high expectations for themselves, and their parents may show up. I don't think that you get that in college--at least I didn't.

Maria remembered one course prior to her graduation in 1994 with a title similar to Cultural Differences that she felt had offensive undertones of stereotyping:

> I think they were sort of stereotyping and saying that all poor people will live with the way conditions are without even attempting to do otherwise. That was a little offensive. My dad worked for the city, and there were a lot of children in my family, but my dad would not have let a broken faucet sit there. He would have done something about it.

Gloria recalled that she completed one class called Socioeconomic Influences on Learning prior to her graduation in 2001. Further, Gloria declared, "The one thing I took away from that class is I was always somewhat afraid to discuss and bring up differences, but that class forced me to see that it's actually good to bring up differences among us because that's what makes us who we are." In addition to reading Kozol's (1991) *Savage Inequalities*, Gloria also remembered that the instructor of the course focused on "how culture impacts learning and good strategies to use with diverse students."

When Evette attended the teacher preparation program prior to her graduation in 2000, she took one class that focused on cultural differences, but it did not necessarily prepare her to be effective with African American students.

> There was one class that I took, and I don't remember the name of it, but it had to do with cultural differences. That was an interesting experience. I wouldn't say it prepared me, but it made me aware of a lot of other people's views and

> other people's experiences. That class, I think, kind of motivated me a little bit more to really seek out this population. There were a lot of things I was hearing from other people, and it made me angry. It made me feel like I wanted to be something to prove them wrong.

A few of the teachers mentioned subject area courses that exposed them to some effective teaching strategies to use with diverse populations, indicating some consistency with the one of the criteria for being a culturally relevant teacher involving academic achievement. One of Jennifer's instructors really made an impression upon her the first day of class when he read Hoffman's (1991) *Amazing Grace,* a children's book in which the main character is an African American girl. This reading course prompted Jennifer to note that children need to "see themselves in books." Jennifer indicated that some of her content area classes helped her to acquire some effective teaching strategies in the areas of science, reading, and writing, but the reading class in which the professor read Hoffman's (1991) *Amazing Grace* was the only one that made connections regarding diverse student populations.

Field Experiences

For the majority of the teachers, the field experiences were the most beneficial in preparing students to work with diverse populations. Most of the teachers did their student teaching in schools that had mostly Hispanic and African American students. Jennifer indicated that she "deliberately asked" to do her student teaching at a school with minority students who live in poverty. Constance recalled that diversity was present in all of her field experiences. Further, both her practicums and her one semester of

student teaching were completed on campuses that had predominantly Hispanic students, and the rest of the students were African American:

> I remember the biggest issue for me was students who had parents in prison and students who had been abandoned by both parents and were being raised by their grandparents. In my practicum that was the first time that I had dealt with that, which was just such a foreign thing to me. I knew it happened all the time, but personally, I had never dealt with that. For me it was heart wrenching, but for these kids I'm sure it's heart wrenching as well, but they come to school every day and just deal with it.

According to Martha, the most important component of her teacher preparation program involved her student teaching assignment:

> I purposely decided that I wanted to student teach at that school. . . . They placed me with a very competent teacher. She was wonderful. I learned a lot from her. She said a lot of teachers leave within the first five years, and it's not the students that are going to make you leave. It's going to be the adults that make you leave. I understand her now. They force you to sit there for an entire semester at the back of the classroom and take notes. The amount of time that they allowed us to be in there helped also.

Contributions to Success

Since the factors that play a role in whether or not teachers are successful are important to their development, contributions to success emerged as a theme in this study across all participant data. The data collected in this emergent theme assists in answering two of the four research questions investigated in this study:

1. What are teachers' perceptions of their effectiveness with African American students in a large urban school district?

2. What other components do the teachers identify that contributed to their effectiveness with African American students?

Five subthemes emerged within this main theme of contributions to success and will be presented in the following manner: (a) personal beliefs, (b) teacher preparation, (c) mentors, (d) administrative support, and (e) suggestions for improvement.

Personal Beliefs

The teachers were able to identify attributes about themselves that make them successful with African American students. When reflecting upon her three years as a teacher, Constance attributed her effectiveness with African American students to her parents raising her to respect everyone, going to diverse schools, having diverse friends, finding the right words to say to parents, and seeing every child as an individual. Rita attributed her effectiveness with African American students to her unwillingness to "see color." By saying this, Rita indicated that she does not want to form opinions about students' cultural backgrounds and abilities. Further, Rita explained that she is a minority herself, and she believes in changing students' perceptions of themselves. Other components that Rita attributed to her effectiveness with African American students include teamwork, the conscientiousness of having an "A" personality, and professional development.

Gloria relayed that she focuses on connecting with the community and building relationships with her students and their parents. Like Rita, Gloria also declared that she does not see color, for she identifies students' "needs and strengths before anything else:"

> I think all students are the same when they walk in my room. I treat them the same way that I would treat anybody else. People are people. I am here to do my job to teach them, to nurture them, and to identify any problems that they have. I

> just see them as someone who needs to learn. I wouldn't teach them any differently. I just look at needs first and foremost, and maybe those needs are directly or indirectly related to the culture.

Martha attributed her effectiveness with African America students to having the same expectations for all of her students:

> I have the same standards for them no matter what, even if they have a low socioeconomic status or are in special education. I have the same standards for all of my kids, and I expect the same things from them. I tell them that I will help you with whatever I can outside of school, but when you are with me you are going to do what everybody else is doing. In the real world, you are going to be expected to do what everybody else is doing. I think just holding them to the same standards as all of my other students has been very effective.

When pondering why she is effective with African American students, Rebecca noted that meeting different kinds of students and families and having small groups of students assist in making connections with individual students. In addition, Rebecca shared that her experience and her commitment to keeping high expectations for her students has contributed to her effectiveness.

Evette attributed her effectiveness with African American students to building relationships with students and their families and having the desire to "be a positive role model" and "change some of the things" that the students experience in school. Evette declared, "I believe in them, and I believe that they can do well."

As Jennifer pondered why she is effective with African American students, she declared, "I can relate to them." Since she has been teaching, Jennifer shared that learning more strategies to employ with African American students, understanding their families, and understanding their home environments had helped her to become more successful with African American students.

Although Brenda expressed that she likes to think of herself as a successful teacher in general, she conveyed that she is successful with African American students because she immerses herself in their culture. Since Brenda has been teaching, "continuing to learn, to grow, and to evolve" has helped her to be more successful with African American students. Further, Brenda expressed that she practices being aware of what is going on in the city and being aware of issues that affect everyone at her school because that has helped her to relate to students when they walk through the door every day. Brenda declared, "I don't want to get stuck in a rut. I don't want to be that old white lady who doesn't know anything about what my life is like."

Teacher Preparation

The majority of the teachers identified the field experiences within the teacher preparation program as effective in preparing them to work with African American students successfully. Rita focused on coursework as contributing to her success with African American students. Rita discussed how her teacher preparation program assisted her with implementing effective teaching strategies. With her endorsement in reading, Rita shared how she can pinpoint what is interfering with a students' progress in reading and devise strategies to help them overcome those challenges. Gloria conveyed that "firsthand experience" in the classroom assisted her in being effective with African American students.

With her teacher preparation experience, Rebecca noted that the most effective components were her field experiences and the theories that she learned:

> I think it would be important to look at different schools, not just be placed in one school and be done with it. I don't think that's the best preparation. I think the university gives you a really broad look at different philosophies, depending on the professor that you get. It gives you a really broad look at things. I can't say it was all very practical. I really can't say that. That would be a good thing. I don't know that some of the classes are all that practical.
>
> I think overall I was well prepared because the university sets high expectations for you, and when I got out, whether I had been this way or not, I was ready to do extra work or put in the time needed to do what you needed to do because you did work hard through the university. There is no doubt. You had to put in your time. You can't just float through it. I think that probably helped me with the self-discipline and stuff like that.

Evette recalled that the actual student teaching assignment helped to prepare her for effectiveness with African American students. Further, Evette conveyed that she was able to observe someone else teaching, so she learned how to interact the students, identify "what works and what doesn't work," and determine "what made them tick." Jennifer indicated that her year-long student teaching assignment and the one reading course that integrated multiculturalism assisted her in being effective with African American students.

Mentors

Several of the teachers identified mentors who were beneficial to their effectiveness with African American students. Mentors included their supervisors from the university, the teachers in their assigned student teaching classrooms, and teachers on their campuses. During her student teaching, Cassandra had a mentor teacher whom she described as "powerful." Maria contributed much of her effectiveness with African American students to her mentor teacher. Maria's mentor teacher was an African American woman who served as her "best model" as a teacher. Maria described herself

as “human,” whereas her mentor was not because she emitted perfection in her work as a teacher. According to Maria, it was not necessarily academics that prepared her for her success with African American students, for it was the experience she has acquired over time, and her ability to “see children.”

When reflecting upon why she is successful with African American students, Gloria proclaimed, “I don’t see color.” Further, she expressed that she identifies students’ “needs and strengths before anything else:”

> I think all students are the same when they walk in my room. I treat them the same way that I would treat anybody else. People are people. I am here to do my job to teach them, to nurture them, and to identify any problems that they have. I just see them as someone who needs to learn. I wouldn’t teach them any differently. I just look at needs first and foremost, and maybe those needs are directly or indirectly related to the culture.

Brenda indicated that the supervising teacher from the teacher preparation program attributed to her success with African American students. Brenda asserted, “She was the one person I think that really taught me this is what you are teaching, this is why you are teaching it, and this is how you know the kids are being successful.” Brenda also expressed that her cooperating teacher, the teacher who allowed her to complete the student teaching assignment in her classroom, had many years of teaching experience and was important in her development as a teacher.

Administrative Support

All of the teachers identified a characteristic about their campus administrators that assists them in being effective with African American students. According to Constance, the campus administration makes “an earnest effort to make a big deal about

success." As Martha pondered the role of the campus administration in the students' achievement, she expressed her belief that the administrators' role is to provide the "tools for learning and the best curriculum to meet the needs of their learning." In Martha's opinion, "We all are born with that innate ability to learn." Therefore, Martha conveyed that the school's role in students' achievement is to motivate them and to provide them with the tools to be successful in the learning that is ultimately their responsibility.

Cassandra expressed that the support staff at her school has been the most beneficial in her effectiveness with African American students. The principal at Cassandra's school has made sure that the school has support services such as community organizations, parent specialists, and family dinner programs. Cassandra asserted, "They've really stepped in and taken a lot of the social work out of the classroom for us."

From Rita's perspective, the administrative leadership in the school is the reason that her school is so successful, for the main objective of the administrative team is "support for the child." According to Gloria, the administration, along with the other staff members, are responsible for making the school a place in which students can "feel safe" while they are learning, making friends, and building character.

According to Rebecca, the campus administration must play a role in the students' achievement by providing an inviting and nurturing environment" as soon as they enter the campus. When thinking about the role of the administration on the students' achievement, Evette expressed that having a family atmosphere is important:

> I think we really become a family. Everyone is very close-knit from the teachers to the students. A lot of the things that we talk to the students about and teach them about is consistent all the way across the board. It has really helped in turning our school around, and it really shows in the students. It's really been positive for us to be one and together.

From Jennifer's perspective the role of the school administration is simply "to set up systems and procedures that will help the children and teachers to be successful." In addition, Jennifer expressed that the administrators' role with teachers is to "make sure that almost everything you do really has a purpose" and "that you are not wasting anybody's time."

As Martha pondered the role of the campus administration in the students' achievement, she expressed her belief that the administrators' role is to provide the "tools for learning and the best curriculum to meet the needs of their learning."

Suggestions for Improvement

The teachers all identified components that would have been more helpful in preparing them to be successful with African American students. The majority of the teachers targeted a component of teacher preparation that could improve in preparing teachers to be effective with African American students. For instance, Jennifer indicated the she needed more classes that integrated multiculturalism. Further, Brenda indicated that having strategies before she accepted the position would have helped her to be more successful with African American students. According to Martha, knowing more about her African American students' cultural backgrounds would have been more helpful in preparing her to be successful with African American students:

> I still feel like I don't know enough. The longer I teach the more connected I feel, especially with the parents because the children are so loving. It doesn't matter to them, but sometimes with the parents I feel like I need to be more aware of what they are going through and what their beliefs are to be able to relate more with them.

Exposure to diverse populations at low-income schools would have been more helpful in preparing Cassandra to be more successful with African American students. Constance felt as though "exposure to recent literature about teaching African American students" would have been more helpful in her teacher preparation program:

> I feel like something from an African American viewpoint would also be really helpful instead of just from someone else writing a book and talking about how it was so different. Reading a book from an African American standpoint that gives perspectives such as this is what is going on, this is what this means, this is how you should act, and this is what you should not react to would also be helpful.

When reflecting upon what would have been more helpful in preparing her to be successful with African American students, Rebecca indicated that she would have liked more classes that specifically focused on students with learning disabilities and what to do when the students cannot read or write:

> Don't show me, this is why they can't do it. Okay, that's great. All of that is great to know. I want to know what has worked or what might work. Give me some armor to go into the classroom with. Don't just tell me these are all the theory bases. I want to know. . . . a really proven strategy.

Evette expressed that having instructors who "had actually been there" and could give her tips on how to be more successful would have been more helpful in preparing her to be successful with African American students instead of getting strange looks when she said she wanted to work in a school with minority students who have low

socioeconomic backgrounds. Further, Evette indicated that many of her instructors "didn't have that experience, so they really couldn't tell you either way."

Data Analysis of Emergent Themes with University Faculty

Two university faculty members at the highly selective public university in Texas were interviewed regarding the elementary teacher preparation program and evolution of the multicultural education training component. Four common themes emerged from the data: (a) multicultural education, (b) focusing on African American students, (c) field-based opportunities, and (d) next steps. The commonalities and differences present in the university faculty members' perceptions are reported using a descriptive narrative approach.

Multicultural Education

Both Dr. Frank Daniels and Dr. Sandra Adams discussed efforts at the university to address multicultural education in the coursework within the undergraduate elementary teacher preparation program. According to Dr. Daniels, the undergraduate elementary teacher preparation program has shown some signs of evolution in its emphasis on multicultural education since the early 1970's when he became a professor at the university. Dr. Daniels discussed how he and a colleague advocated for a course in multicultural education that became a part of the curriculum in 1985. The course that Dr. Daniels currently coordinates and teaches is called Sociocultural Influences on Learning and is a required course for students in the undergraduate teacher preparation program. Dr. Daniels indicated that has been driven by a need to recruit diverse staff members to teach the course. Seven of the nine instructors are faculty members of color.

In the conversations with Dr. Daniels and Dr. Adams, there seemed to be an emphasis on two of Ladson-Billings' criteria for preparing culturally relevant teachers: cultural competence and sociopolitical consciousness. Academic achievement was not an apparent focus of the coursework. According to the course description, Sociocultural Influences on Learning consists of the following content: (a) human learning in multisocial, multilingual, and multicultural contexts; (b) realities of society and their impact on learning; and (c) social concerns such as prejudice, stereotyping, cross-cultural attitudes, bilingual issues, and parent and community involvement.

To allow for autonomy, the structure, readings, and requirements vary for each professor who teaches Sociocultural Influences on Learning. The nine professors who teach this course have the freedom to create their own syllabus so that the strengths of the individual faculty members are emphasized:

> Everybody has the freedom to do the course any way they would like to within a certain framework. We need to address diversity issues and equity issues, but we've tried to organize it so that the strengths of different faculty can be emphasized. We don't expect every course to look exactly the same. We do expect people to challenge the students about their own views of diversity and equity, and we expect them to try to give the students readings and field experiences that make them reflect on their own lack of knowledge about this area and motivate them to learn more and be self-critical about their own background and approaches. So how a faculty does that in particular depends upon how they want to do it. There are broad goals that the course must do and offer some good background on history and culture of key groups, primarily Latino and African American, but there's no rigid formula for how people should teach the course. Everyone is free to teach it how they would like to.

Although the section that Dr. Daniels teaches of Sociocultural Influences on Learning incorporates service learning, field experiences, and a reflective essay, Dr. Adams teaches this course and concurred that she has the freedom to create her own

objectives. As a professor in the special education department, Dr. Adams expressed that she addresses disability and diversity and the intersection between the two with the prospective teachers in her class. With the autonomy that is allowed with the course, there is no cohesiveness with what students are actually reading, discussing, or creating.

Focusing on African American Students

Both Dr. Daniels and Dr. Adams indicated that the undergraduate teacher preparation program has not been focusing on specific strategies that work for particular groups of students. According to Dr. Daniels, Sociocultural Influences on Learning, the one course that specifically addresses diverse populations, focuses on culturally relevant teaching instead of targeting students of particular racial or ethnic background:

> I don't think the group kind of only feels like there are particular strategies that only work for African American or Mexican American or Asian American students. I think that there's an attempt to teach a philosophy of culturally relevant teaching, and there are key authors. There are multicultural educators.
>
> We use those materials, so the general approach to be more conscious and aware of these issues and aware of the equity issues is there, but I don't think anybody thinks there is a particular methodology that works best for any particular ethnic or racial group.
>
> All kids respond to respect, etcetera. I think there's no precise method that anybody is trying to teach. There are certain general attitudes and certain values and philosophy that I think everybody tries to teach, but I don't think it's real specific about techniques or whatever.

As an instructor who teaches Sociocultural Influences on Learning, Dr. Adams shared her reflections on instructional strategies and how they pertain to African American students:

> I think that when we talk about research-based instruction, the idea behind research-based instruction is that we are going into various settings, we are testing these strategies across multiple populations, and we are trying to

> ascertain the extent to which different kids are responding to the strategies and to the teaching techniques. I'm not quite sure yet where I come down on the extent to which culture influences the degree to which a student responds.
>
> I know that there are differences, but I don't know if it's so much cognitively as it is emotionally and psychologically. There are a lot of things going on that we probably don't ever think about in terms of why a student might respond to a certain intervention in one way compared to how another student might respond to the same intervention the same way. But I think to discount that there is some influence is inherently flawed in our thinking.

Dr. Adams expressed that her students examine their own prejudices and biases in her class. Further, Dr. Adams shared her belief that people "are really erring" when they say that culture does not matter or that people learn the same way. Although specific strategies to use with particular racial or ethnic groups are not discussed in Dr. Adams' class, she did indicate that researchers must be careful when analyzing group responses.

Subsequently, Dr. Adams proclaimed, "A lot of culturally and linguistically diverse kids have not been included in the studies, so it's really not fair to compare a child who has not been included to children who have been included."

Field-Based Opportunities

Literature that focuses on effective practices in teacher preparation indicates that field-based experiences should be used in preparing teachers for diverse student populations (Zeichner & Gore, 1990; Ladson-Billings, 2001). Dr. Daniels indicated that one of the biggest improvements within the undergraduate elementary teacher preparation program has been the implementation of more field-based opportunities for students to be exposed to diverse communities and populations.

Among their field-based opportunities, students experience service learning, tutoring, community organizations, and a year-long student teaching assignment. Even though many of the professors feel as though the number of opportunities could be higher, Dr. Daniels remarked, "It takes a huge commitment of faculty time to supervise that sort of thing…. The pressure on the faculty is tremendous to do a lot of work at the university." Further, Dr. Daniels held that more graduate assistants could help them design better field-based experiences for the prospective teachers to make them "realize more what they lack in terms of knowledge of other cultures." Although Dr. Daniels does not place students at their student teaching locations, he believes that the majority of the students complete their assignments at lower income schools "which are now resegregated and are predominantly Mexican American or African American or Mexican American and African American."

With the community engagement requirements that students must complete, they have the opportunity to meet an indicator within cultural competence that Ladson-Billings (2001) presented as one of the criteria for being a culturally relevant teachers. Culturally relevant teachers take responsibility for learning about students' culture and community. This would be especially relevant if teachers were placed with community organizations associated with the community in which they will complete their year-long student teaching assignment. For community engagement, Dr. Daniels indicated that the students work in various types of organizations with focus areas that include environmental issues, social welfare situations, parental concerns, and drug abuse issues:

> You also don't want to send people out into social problem areas and reinforce stereotypes they already have about groups by having them work only with problem groups and look to working in community groups that are doing real constructive stuff. I think the emphasis is to find programs where the students can participate with ongoing community activities that are pretty positive in character so they can see that these communities are working hard to solve their own problems, and they can assist them. There are more attempts to find that than there would be to work with battered women or drug addicts or something like that where you might get stereotyping.
>
> We're always looking for more community-oriented projects where we get the students out of the schools and get them into community projects where they can see the community doing stuff for themselves. That would be the theory behind it. That becomes a little more difficult to organize because, again, you can't just throw people out in the community and make up some structured way that these undergraduates can have an experience that's positive. Otherwise, they will be coming back with more negative attitudes, which is not what we want. We're working on that. We need a little bit more resources to do that really well.

Although Dr Adams does not incorporate field-based experiences in her section of Sociocultural Influences on Learning like Dr. Daniels, she mentioned that when students are in their first semester of the cohort program, they take another course in which field-based experiences are incorporated as a part of four foundational courses.

Next Steps

When reflecting upon the next steps toward reform in the area of multicultural education, the comments made by the two university professors were consistent with several indicators of cultural competence, one of the three criteria that Ladson-Billings (1995a, 2001) found to be common among culturally relevant teachers. In Dr. Daniels' opinion, the university needs to develop its community service learning through the help of individuals such as teacher assistants or staff members who are devoted to this portion of the program. With his background as an anthropologist, Dr. Daniels wants students to understand their communities and families instead of simply being "narrow technicians"

who are “pouring information into the heads of kids.” Further, Dr. Daniels expressed that the surrounding large urban school district could be more progressive in this area because the district “does not encourage their teachers to really do a lot of home visits and really know the community very well.” Dr. Daniels also indicated that the practicing teachers do not live in the communities where they teach, so “there’s a pretty big disconnect here between teachers and the communities they serve in a lot of ways.”

Dr. Adams indicated that the special education department at the university has been restructuring its undergraduate elementary teacher preparation program to weave multiculturalism throughout the courses instead of in just one course. In addition, Dr. Adams discussed an evaluation component that has been devised by the teacher education committee to follow through on implementation and to examine prospective teachers’ perceptions of the program. Because teacher graduates are coming back and voicing their discontent with their preparedness to teach diverse students, Dr. Adams proclaimed, “I think over time we are going to see more and more faculty members just out of sheer necessity having to rethink and reconceptualize how they go about training teachers.”

According to Dr. Adams, the special education department at the university is rallying for a progressive movement towards inclusion and is diligently trying to define what diversity means in the university’s college of education as it relates to preparing future teachers. The teacher education committee, comprised in 2003 of at least five departments in the university’s college of education, has developed a mission statement that conveys the attempt to prepare teachers for the future. On the teacher education

committee, Dr. Adams recalled devising objectives that involve the need to have more professional development among the faculty to equip them to design their coursework and the field-based experiences in ways that will give the teachers that direct contact and exposure to diverse students and diverse communities. According to Dr. Adams, the university's college of education is "moving just beyond mere rhetoric" to either "put up or shut up" when making decisions about reform in the area of teacher preparation.

Further, Dr. Adams held that the college of education will look at diversity in terms of sociocultural issues and in terms of different learning styles and different learning needs because "teachers were falling short" on both areas. Dr. Adams holds similar beliefs to scholars who challenge the No Child Left Behind Act's call for highly qualified teachers while it focuses exclusively on subject matter, ignoring pedagogy and other professional knowledge and skills (Cochran-Smith, 2005). When thinking about the profile of a highly qualified teacher, Dr. Adams remarked, "What I write about now is that I don't believe the teacher is highly qualified just by virtue of passing the exit exam" because prospective teachers can "do exceptionally well on that exam and still not really be qualified to deal with the complexities of the classroom today." For Dr. Adams, highly qualified includes cultural competence and adeptness with disability:

> It may not have implications for the teacher that goes into the suburban school or into the affluent neighborhood school, but the reality is that is not where the majority of our teachers begin. They begin in highly diverse school settings, and those people who look at attrition literature know that these teachers are burning out within the first two or three years. My thought is that it's happening because they leave with the ideal version of what teaching is going to be like, and then reality sets in about two or three hours into their first appointment. They never told us this! If they taught them, they gave them such a flawed understanding of

> what diversity was that. . . . now they are confronted with the realization that these kids are not like what you all said they were.

Because prospective teachers are presented with strategies that will work for some populations and not others, Dr. Adams even believes that some professors send students out with a bias toward students who are poor or who are culturally and linguistically diverse. According to Dr. Adams, teacher candidates leave the university with a "very skewed understanding about which kids are likely to respond to certain kinds of teaching techniques." The evaluative tool that the teacher education committee for teacher graduates will serve as valuable feedback to them as they continue to implement reform.

Interpretation of Findings on Teacher Participants

This was an interpretive qualitative study (Merriam, 2002) of 10 elementary school teachers who were nominated by their principals as effective teachers of African American students. The main purpose of this study was to analyze the perceptions and beliefs of these 10 teachers. When speaking with these teachers through interviews, it was the researcher's hope and intent to identify the common attributes and characteristics of teachers who are effective with African American students. All participants shared their perceptions and beliefs in their own unique ways. Commonalities and differences existed among the 5 elementary school principals who nominated teachers on their various campuses.

Data were analyzed using Ladson-Billings' (1995a, 2001) theoretical framework of culturally relevant pedagogy involving the indicators of three criteria: (a) an ability to

develop students academically; (b) a willingness to nurture and support cultural competence; and (c) the development of a sociopolitical or critical consciousness. Although the teachers showed an ability to develop students academically and a willingness to nurture and support cultural competence on various levels, all of the indicators for the development of a sociopolitical or critical consciousness were not apparent for the teachers. Although the teachers' perceptions regarding teaching, culture, expectations for students, academic accountability, preparatory experiences, and contributions to success often differed, several commonalities were evident in their beliefs. Using Ladson-Billings' (1995a, 2001) theoretical framework of culturally relevant pedagogy, an interpretation of the emergent themes in the data analysis will be presented through a narrative descriptive approach in the following manner: (a) perceptions of culture, (b) beliefs about teaching, (c) academic accountability, (d) teacher preparation, and (e) contributions to success.

Perceptions of Culture

Within the emergent theme perceptions of culture, six subthemes emerged as the data was analyzed: (a) definitions of culture, (b) colorblindness, (c) incorporating culture, (d) poverty, (e) family dynamics, and (f) building relationships. One of Ladson-Billings' criteria for being a culturally relevant teacher involving cultural competence was evident at various levels for the teachers. Some teachers' perceptions were more consistent with cultural competence than others for certain indicators.

Within their definitions of culture, the majority of the teachers did not acknowledge ethnic or racial backgrounds as being a part of a student's culture. Only

one teacher gave a comprehensive definition that regarded culture as being a concept that affects every aspect of life (Ladson-Billings, 2001). The majority of the teachers identified some cultural differences that existed between their students and themselves, but only one African American teacher acknowledged a cultural bias toward students within her own race. As literature on preparing teachers for classrooms with culturally diverse students suggests, the majority of these teachers did not indicate that they engage in examining their perceptions of their own culture as well as their perceptions of their students' culture (Gay & Kirkland, 2003; Ladson-Billings, 2001).

When discussing their students' culture, three of the teachers rendered perceptions that were consistent with colorblind ideology. These teachers talked about how they do not see color when implementing teaching practices that are effective with African American students. Ladson-Billings (2001) referred to these instances of colorblindness as "dysconscious racism," which is an "uncritical habit of mind that justifies inequity and exploitation by accepting the existing order of things as given" (pp. 31-32). This term does not imply that the teachers are racist. Rather, it implies that the teachers were not conscious of the ways in which some students are privileged and others are disadvantaged in the classroom. These teachers attempted to justify their colorblindness by saying that they see individual students instead of color. These teachers all acknowledged that the achievement gap exists for many African American students and that poor African American students' educational experiences in public schools differ when compared to white students' educational experiences. Instead of not acknowledging that these differences exist, the three teachers wanted to convey that they

do not form prejudice attitudes toward their students or hold the belief that they cannot learn at high levels because of their racial backgrounds. It is interesting that two of the three teachers who expressed colorblind ideology are members of the Hispanic minority group. Since the researcher was African American, it is possible that the teachers did not want to seem prejudice in any way since the topic involved African American students.

When incorporating culture into the curriculum, the teachers mostly talked about how they incorporate students' names and experiences into their lessons, but they did not indicate that they use students' culture as a basis for learning at high levels. They did, however, indicate that they attempt to build on students' prior knowledge to introduce unfamiliar concepts. The majority of the teachers were not adept at promoting a flexible use of students' local and global culture. Only one teacher discussed how students in her class were discussing their outrage regarding injustices with females in Africa.

Several of the teachers attributed the concern with African American students' underachievement to poverty, but they did not see that part of their students' culture as an impediment to learning. The lack of students' educational experiences was an instructional concern that the teachers had and indicated that they needed to compensate for what the students were lacking at home. Although the teachers did not seem to be capitalizing on the culture of poverty to enhance their knowledge and skills of the curriculum, they did not see socioeconomic status as a barrier to student success.

Family dynamics was a consistent concern for all of the teachers. They discussed how many of the students lacked support at home and how family values played an

important role in how students viewed education and their future goals. There was a clear indication with this subtheme that the teachers needed to learn more about the students' culture and community. A few of the teachers talked about how they understood some of the family dynamics and their effects on the students at the school. Further, some of the teachers talked about getting to know more about the students' families in order obtain more parental support. Only one teacher talked in detail about how she immerses herself in the community in order to build more connections with her students and families.

Building relationships was a common subtheme among all of the teachers. The teachers all talked about the importance of building relationships, and the majority of them shared that they have had mostly positive experiences with parents. The majority of the teachers talked about challenges with unsupportive parents not helping their students at home. A few of the teachers talked about strategies for reaching those unsupportive parents. Further, a few of the teachers were not optimistic about their ability to build relationships with difficult or unsupportive parents due to challenges they have experienced. Taking responsibility for learning about students' culture and community would help them in their quest to build relationships with the parents that they view as unsupportive.

On various levels, all of the teachers showed some cultural competence. Learning more about students' cultural backgrounds and communities will assist these teachers in using culture as a basis for learning and building relationships with students and their parents.

Beliefs About Teaching

Although the teachers' personal beliefs about teaching varied, the teachers' commitment to student success is consistent with one of the criteria that Ladson-Billings (1995a, 2001) found common among culturally relevant teachers involving an ability to develop students academically. Three subthemes became evident under this main theme of beliefs about teaching: (a) commitment to successful outcomes, (b) teaching practices, and (c) expectations for students.

It was clear in the conversations with the teachers that all of them had a commitment to successful outcomes for their students. Scholars have held that educators who attribute students' problems with student achievement to their lack of readiness to learn in the classroom, the parents' lack of interest in their education, and the families' overall lifestyles hold views consistent with the deficit thinking paradigm (Delpit, 1995; Valencia, 1991). Although the majority of the teachers identified parental support, students' lack of motivation, socioeconomic status, and home environment to the achievement gap that persists with African American students, these teachers did not use these aspects of students' lives as excuses for school failure. Despite the challenges that their students face regarding poverty and family dynamics, the teachers expressed that they believe in their students' capability to be educated, a characteristic not consistent with the deficit thinking paradigm.

When thinking about their teaching practices, the teachers all acknowledged that students learn differently, and they shared how they tailor strategies to meet the individual needs of students. Although the teachers are bound by state and district

standards, they were able to delineate what achievement means in the context of the classroom on various levels. Although some of the principals talked about how the teachers shared progress and achievement goals with the students, that was not a common theme that emerged during conversations with the teachers. They did, however, discuss that excellence is something to strive for and that students are excellent in different ways. The teachers all expressed their knowledge of the curriculum, the students' needs, and how to address those needs. Further, the teachers talked about assessing for individual student growth. Oral language development and lack of educational experiences were the only instructional concerns that the teachers had for not only African American students in poverty, but for all minority students in poverty, indicating that their practices can be effective with all students, not just African American students.

Having expectations for students was a consistent subtheme for all of the teachers. For instance, several of the teachers mentioned that they hold high academic and behavioral expectations for their students or that they hold all of their students to the same standards. Several of the teachers' statements regarding a commitment to successful outcomes were consistent with an indicator of sociopolitical consciousness regarding the teacher believing that a student's success has consequences for his or her own quality of life. Some of the teachers were concerned about the students' future goals because of family dynamics and their community environments. This is an area in which teachers could assist in connecting the students to the larger social context through a sociopolitical consciousness. When talking about standardized testing, only one teacher

discussed in detail how she encourages her students to challenge existing beliefs about the underachievement that occurs with many Hispanic and African American students. More conversations about social justice and sociopolitical action need to occur in these teachers' classrooms to assist the students in challenging the status quo as they progress through life.

Academic Accountability

Although some of the teachers expressed some different beliefs regarding standardized testing, all of the teachers expressed an interest in the academic success of their students. Irvine (2003) contended that teachers have to be perceived as a part of the solution in closing the achievement gap instead of the problem. Data indicate that the achievement gap that persists for many children of color when compared to their white, often middle-class counterparts in Texas (TEA, 2006). Ladson-Billings' (1995a, 2001) criteria for a culturally relevant teacher involving academic achievement were analyzed in this theme. One of the four indicators of sociopolitical consciousness involving the teacher believing that a student's success has consequences for his or her own quality of life was evident with one teacher. Two subthemes emerged within this main theme: individualized instruction and beliefs about standardized testing.

Although all of the teachers are aware of the standards that the state and district hold for their students, they discussed their use of individualized instruction with their students. Both formal and informal assessments are used to identify students' needs. These teachers expressed relentless efforts in assisting their students in achieving successful outcomes.

As they discussed their beliefs about standardized testing, the majority of the teachers were critical of this type of testing and discussed how one measure of a student's abilities is not sufficient. The majority of the teachers expressed their wishes that the teachers could assess for growth instead of holding all of the students to the same passing standard. They shared their disdain with how the same test is given for all students, regardless of their backgrounds. Several of the teachers expressed a belief in a measure; however, they advocated for varied assessments. One teacher continuously shared her pleasure with the results that her students receive on standardized tests and talked about how she is preparing them for college entrance exams. With a critical consciousness, the majority of them expressed that the results of standardized testing stifle innovative curriculum, only show passing rates, and do not consider the individual progress of students. Despite their critical viewpoints about standardized testing, the teachers knew the consequences that passing these tests have for their quality of life, so they expressed diligence in preparing their students to meet successful outcomes, no matter how they felt about the tests.

Teacher Preparation

Although all of the participants attended the same highly selective public university in Texas at different times, there were both commonalities and differences among their different experiences. Two subthemes emerged within this theme of teacher preparation: university coursework and field experiences. Within the teachers' conversations about the coursework at the teacher preparation program, competency with Ladson-Billings' (1995a, 2001) three criteria of a culturally relevant teacher was

not evident as a focus of a significant amount of the coursework. However, some attempts have been made by the university and various professors to incorporate some indicators of culturally relevant pedagogy on some level. With the exception of the teacher who graduated in 1976, the teachers were required to take at least one course that focused on multicultural education and diverse student populations. Some of the teachers talked about how they discussed various components relating to students' culture and engaged in dialogue with other teacher candidates about their cultural perspectives. One teacher indicated that the prospective teachers had field experiences within one course that familiarized them with the community.

Some of the teachers mentioned that specific subject-matter courses focused on effective teaching strategies to improve academic achievement, another criteria for being a culturally relevant teacher. Few instances of a sociopolitical consciousness were evident. For instance, one teacher talked about how she read Kozol's (1991) *Savage Inequalities* that has themes of sociopolitical consciousness.

The majority of the teachers were required to have student teaching, and several of them attributed those field experiences to their effectiveness with African American students. Many of them worked in schools with diverse populations, and some of them indicated that they asked to work in schools with diverse student populations when they completed their student teaching. Scholars advocate that teachers must have a willingness to work with culturally diverse students in order to be effective with them (Irvine, 2003; Ladson-Billings, 2001).

Contributions to Success

The teachers were able to identify several factors that play a role in their success with African American students. Five subthemes emerged within this main theme of contributions to success: (a) personal beliefs, (b) teacher preparation, (c) mentors, (d) administrative support, and (e) suggestions for improvement.

Literature on teacher preparation suggests that effective teachers of culturally diverse students often share common characteristics (Ladson-Billings, 1994, 1995a). When thinking about factors that contribute to their success, all of the teachers rendered personal beliefs about themselves or their teaching that assist in their effectiveness with African American students. These attributes included persistence, a commitment to student success, persistence, personal background, and building relationships with students and their parents.

Colorblindness also emerged with three teachers as they pondered their effectiveness with African American students. They attributed their unwillingness to see color as an asset in their teaching practices. Literature on colorblind ideology cautions that teachers' perspectives involving the inability to see color serve as a form of "dysconscious racism" (Ladson-Billings, 2001) or assimilationist ideals (Valenzuela, 1999). Bonilla-Silva (2006) defined this type of colorblind ideology as minimization of racism, a frame that suggests discrimination is no longer a central factor affecting minorities' life chances. Lewis contended that colorblind ideology, like that embodied by the three teachers, asserts a race-neutral context and stigmatizes attempts to raise questions about redressing racial inequality in daily life. Although they attempted to

justify their beliefs as rejections of prejudices against their students, the teachers who assumed colorblind ideology as an asset to their teaching are stifling a sociopolitical consciousness in their students and are essentially perpetuating the status quo.

Teacher preparation was a common subtheme among the teachers. Scholars of multicultural education hold that many new teachers are not prepared to be successful with culturally diverse students (Banks, 1994; Gay, 2003). Teacher preparation has been the target of school reform, but the teachers were able to identify some components of their programs that attributed to their effectiveness with African American students. Although a few teachers identified subject-matter courses that gave them effective teaching strategies, the majority of the teachers identified working with diverse student populations in their field experiences as beneficial in preparing them to work with African American students effectively.

Having effective mentors was a commonality for several of the teachers as a factor in their effectiveness with African American students. These effective mentors included their supervisors from the university, the teachers in their assigned student teaching classrooms, and teachers on their campuses. For some of the teachers going from one effective mentor teacher within their teacher preparation programs to another at their first teaching position was beneficial in their effectiveness with African American students. The expertise and commitment to success that these mentors possessed provided support for the teachers and assisted in their development as effective teachers of African American students.

On their campuses, the teachers were able to identify practices within the campus administration that assist them in being effective with African American students. The majority of the teachers discussed how their administrators have a commitment to student success and support them in their efforts to facilitate successful outcomes for students. These teachers are respected by their principals, and the schools have a climate in which the teachers feel they can be successful.

When pondering what would been more beneficial in assisting them to be successful with African American students, the teachers all had suggestions for improvement in their preparation and development. Several of the teachers would have liked more of a focus on diverse student populations and effective teaching strategies in their university coursework. Some of the teachers would have liked field experiences with diverse student populations.

Interpretation of Findings with University Faculty

Two university faculty members at the highly selective public university in Texas were interviewed regarding the elementary teacher preparation program and the evolution of the multicultural education training component. Four common themes emerged from the data that was analyzed: (a) multicultural education, (b) focusing on African American students, (c) field-based opportunities, and (d) next steps. Through a narrative descriptive approach, this section will provide an interpretation of the data analysis conducted with the emergent themes.

Multicultural Education

Dr. Frank Daniels and Dr. Sandra Adams were the two university faculty members who talked about efforts at the university to address multicultural education in the coursework within the undergraduate elementary teacher preparation program. Dr. Daniels has observed an evolution in its emphasis on multicultural education since the early 1970's when he became a professor at the university. The university evolved from having no classes involving multicultural education to the addition of one course called Sociocultural Influences on Learning in 1985. Seven of the nine professors who teach this course are faculty members of color. In the conversations with Dr. Daniels and Dr. Adams and a review of the course description, there seemed to be an emphasis on two of Ladson-Billings' criteria for preparing culturally relevant teachers: cultural competence and sociopolitical consciousness. In the interviews with the university faculty members, an emphasis on academic achievement did not emerge. Dr. Daniels, the coordinator of Sociocultural Influences on Learning, expressed that the course allows the professors to have autonomy. Consequently, the structure, readings, and requirements vary for each professor in order to emphasize their individual strengths. Although Dr. Daniels expects the faculty members who teach the course to try to incorporate field experiences, Dr. Adams expressed that she does not incorporate field experiences in her class because the students get them in another course. Since everyone is free to organize the course within the broad goals of the course, the prospective teachers in the course could be getting very different experiences in the course due to its lack of cohesiveness.

Focusing on African American Students

According to Dr. Daniels, a focus on teaching strategies to incorporate with African American students is not emphasized in Sociocultural Influences on Learning. Dr. Daniels said that multicultural educators such as Christine Sleeter and Lourdes Soto are introduced to the students; however, he suspects that the group does not believe that there are specific strategies that work best for any particular ethnic or racial group. Dr. Adams concurred that she does not teach specific strategies that work for African American students; she did, however, indicate that people "are really erring" when they say that culture does not matter or that people learn the same way. The students in her class examine their prejudices and biases which is a practice advocated by scholars who conduct research in the area of teacher preparation (Gay & Kirkland, 2003; Ladson-Billings, 2001).

Field-Based Opportunities

With the field-based opportunities at the university, prospective teachers not only have to complete a year-long student teaching assignment, but they also have to engage in community-based organizations. With cultural competence as a focus, having community engagement experiences in the communities in which they will be doing their student teaching would help the teachers be able to learn more about the school community and families.

Next Steps

The next steps for the undergraduate elementary teacher preparation program at the university include incorporating multiculturalism throughout more classes, adding

more field-based opportunities, implementing an evaluation tool for teacher graduates, and adding a focus on diversity to its mission. These are all additional steps toward the improvement of the program that are consistent with the development of culturally relevant teachers (Ladson-Billings, 2001).

Limitations of the Research

Several limitations of the research were evident in this study. One of the most pertinent limitations is the similarity of the researcher's own experiences with those of the participants, and this limitation became more evident as the researcher interviewed the teacher participants. Since eight years of the researcher's experience was spent in urban schools with predominantly African American students as a teacher and as an administrator, absolute objectivity was difficult to assume due to personal biases that may have influenced the process of collecting, analyzing, and interpreting data. The researcher's assumption was that many teacher candidates are not prepared to instruct students with culturally diverse backgrounds in urban schools. In addition, some of the participants may have made comments based on the fact that the researcher was an African American educator who works in an urban school district. Although the researcher's experiences may present some prejudice in perspectives, the perspectives may have served as a heuristic tool to uncover what the participants did not share or what was observed (Patton, 1990).

Other limitations of this study encompass teacher selection and research design. A specific race of practicing teachers was not investigated to explore perspectives unique to a specific culture or race of teachers. Further, students and parents were not

questioned to attain their voice in teacher effectiveness. Since this study focused on teachers' perspectives, a specific site was not selected to observe teachers in practice at one particular urban school. The teachers who participated in this study were from five different schools and were not observed in practice in the classroom.

In addition to teachers' perceptions of their effectiveness with African American students, this study also focused on the components of multicultural education in an undergraduate elementary teacher preparation program and the perspectives of graduate teachers about the training that they received. A further limitation is presented due to the various time periods in which the teachers attended the teacher preparation program. Because the focus was specific to one highly selective public university and one large urban school district, generalizability was problematic. Although generalizability is a perceived difficulty with qualitative research, that was not the intent or purpose of qualitative research or this study. While the data was specific to the experiences of teachers in this study, the implications of the data may be useful for similar contexts and areas of study.

Recommendations and Areas for Further Research

After an analysis of the data, several implications exist for educational practice, teacher preparation, and educational policy. The elementary teachers' perceptions regarding their effectiveness with African American students, interviews with university faculty members at the highly selective public university in Texas, and document analysis of the university's teacher preparation policy and state policy gave insight into recommendations and areas of further research that will be rendered by the researcher.

Therefore, the recommendations are based upon participant data and document analysis. The recommendations will be presented in the following manner: (a) educational practice, (b) teacher preparation, and (c) educational policy. After the recommendations are presented, areas of further research will be provided.

Educational Practice

After analyzing the perceptions of effective teachers of African American students, several possible recommendations for practice became apparent. Some of the teachers mentioned that they did not have the opportunity to work with diverse student populations within their student teaching assignments and felt as though they received an inadequate focus on diverse student populations in their university coursework. Having supportive administrators who provide ongoing professional development related to multicultural education and Ladson-Billings' (1995a, 2001) three criteria of a culturally relevant teacher would be beneficial for all practicing teachers.

The teachers' conversations about culture showed that the majority of the teachers did not meet all indicators of cultural competence and sociopolitical consciousness, indicating a need for ongoing professional development on campuses. Themes of social justice, democracy, and racism were not a commonality among the teachers, for only two teachers talked in detail about conversations that they have with their students related to challenging the status quo. In addition to examining their own cultural biases and prejudices, the teachers needed to learn more about how to use the students' culture as a basis for learning throughout the curriculum and across disciplines. Providing ongoing professional development in this area would be helpful for both new

and veteran teachers. Further, having neighborhood walks at campuses would be one way to assist the teachers in gaining more connections with the school communities and their students' families.

It was evident that the teachers who participated in this study were proficient in assisting their students to achieve academic success, but several of them clearly had some concerns about their students' long-term goals. Being able to negotiate the cultural complexities that exist within the status quo as the students progress through public schools and consider higher education will be a necessity. Since the state of Texas is undergoing a P-16 initiative that has a vision of a seamless transition through the grade levels as students prepare for successful completion of higher education, assisting students in developing a sociopolitical consciousness will assist them as they negotiate various channels of access. Teachers must assist students in having cultural competence and a sociopolitical or critical consciousness so that they can not only attain academic achievement, but also attain success in challenging the status quo.

Evident in teachers' conversations about their commitment to student success, the most predominant competency related to culturally relevant pedagogy was an ability to develop students academically. Commitment to academic success was one reason that the principals nominated these teachers as effective teachers of African American students. However, several of the teachers mentioned that oral language development and lack of educational experiences were the only instructional concerns that the teachers had for not only African American students in poverty, but for all minority students in poverty. This indicates that their practices can be effective with all students,

not just African American students. In addition to the current practice of providing tutoring and summer school for students that are at risk of not passing the TAKS in the grades where promotion is at stake, providing more summer school programs and after-school enrichment opportunities for students that target other academic concerns would assist in enhancing students' prior knowledge.

Several of the teachers mentioned that mentors were beneficial to their effectiveness with African American students. When new teachers are hired, providing mentors to them who are considered effective with diverse student populations and who incorporate culturally relevant pedagogy would assist in the teachers' development.

Teacher Preparation

Education scholars have called attention to the need for programmatic models that focus on preparing prospective teachers to be effective with culturally diverse students (Grant & Secada, 1990; Zeichner, 1996). Teacher preparation programs must make multicultural education and culturally relevant pedagogy important components when preparing teachers for the classroom as they face the growing population of culturally diverse students. Although the Teach for Diversity (TFD) program at the University of Wisconsin-Madison was a master's level teacher preparation program, it emerges as one model of a program that has been effective in preparing prospective teachers for diverse student populations (Ladson-Billings, 1999, 2001). It would be useful to examine the extent to which the undergraduate elementary teacher preparation program is consistent with TFD.

Although the elementary school teachers in this study showed proficiency in their ability to develop students academically and were considered effective by their principals because of this skill, the data indicate that the teachers were not as consistent in cultural competence and sociopolitical consciousness. Further, the teachers and the university faculty identified areas of improvement for the multicultural training component in the undergraduate teacher preparation program. Due to the small sample size of 10 elementary school teachers, a limitation exists in that making generalizations is problematic. However, the undergraduate teacher preparation program at the highly selective university chosen for this study might consider some of the following possible recommendations as reform efforts continue.

One of the components of TFD involved interviewing teachers prior to acceptance to determine if they encompass the goals of diversity within the program. Dr. Daniels indicated that students self-select to be in the teacher preparation program examined in this study. It is important to remember that before considering a teaching career, prospective teachers must have a willingness to deconstruct cultural barriers and preexisting beliefs that may impede their ability to be successful with culturally diverse students. Authors have suggested that prospective teachers bring different perspectives with them into teacher education programs that ultimately render the socializing influence of teacher education courses low in impact (Zeichner & Gore, 1990). Interviewing students prior to their enrollment in teacher preparation courses would assist in identifying students who have a willingness to engage in self-reflection about their own cultural perspectives before working with diverse student populations. Further,

courses within the program should be targeted at this type of self-reflection and critical consciousness. Incorporating self-reflection and critical consciousness could serve as a way to help dispel the colorblind ideology that some of the teachers exhibited in this study.

One criticism of multicultural education is that it does not specifically address issues that serve as prevailing explanations of underachievement among poor and minority students. Banks (1994) asserted that school restructuring is essential in making multicultural education become a reality. When deciding upon what curriculum should be implemented, teacher preparation programs should not just focus on adding cultural artifacts and lesson plans that focus on diversity to the curriculum. TFD incorporated issues related to culture and diversity in more than one course and was a significant focus throughout classroom and community experiences. Both the teachers and the university faculty indicated that only one course specifically targeted multicultural education as a primary focus. Themes of multicultural education and culturally relevant pedagogy should be woven throughout several teacher preparation courses instead of just having one three-hour course that focuses on all topics related to multiculturalism.

The university faculty members expressed that professors are given the freedom to design the one required course with themes of multicultural education, adhering only to broad goals. The faculty could devise some specific commonalities regarding the course content and requirements to provide some cohesiveness for the teachers' experiences. Ensuring that instructors have had prior experience in working with diverse students would serve to give prospective teachers a practitioner's viewpoint.

Multicultural education training components should consist of classes that specifically focus on issues such as race and class through reflective dialogue and deconstruction of preexisting beliefs that serve as barriers to successful outcomes for diverse students.

The majority of the teachers expressed that having field experiences teaching diverse student populations attributed to their effectiveness with African American students. Multicultural education scholars have argued that teacher preparation programs must immerse prospective teachers in schools with diverse student populations (Ladson-Billings, 1999; Zeichner, 1990). In addition to its community engagement projects, TFD ensured that students were placed in schools with culturally diverse students. Many new teachers are placed in urban schools serving poor and minority students on their first teaching assignment. Therefore, providing field experiences and assigning students to community engagement projects within the communities where they will be student teaching will assist them in learning more about the school community and the students' families. Like TFD, university faculty members within the teacher preparation program examined in this study were concerned with not having enough faculty members to sustain a significant number of community engagement projects. Hiring or designating faculty members who have the flexibility to sustain community engagement projects for the prospective teachers could address the university's concern with faculty members who have too many responsibilities.

One of the university faculty members expressed that graduate teachers were complaining that they had not been adequately prepared to be effective with diverse student populations. In addition, several of the teachers expressed their concerns with

not having coursework that prepared them for what they might encounter when working with diverse student populations. After graduate teachers have been assigned to teaching positions, an evaluation tool that collects their perceptions of their preparation would be useful feedback as teacher preparation programs implement reform efforts.

Educational Policy

Even with the implementation of No Child Left Behind, no federal policy specifically addresses multicultural education as a requirement for teacher preparation as the number of culturally diverse students grows within the nation's population. Title II of the Higher Education Act requires three annual reports from states on the quality of teacher preparation, and states are required to submit information regarding licensure, alignment of teacher and student standards, and criteria for identifying low-performing schools. Issues of diversity, however, are not specifically addressed. Critical race theorists have contended that many teacher preparation programs treat issues of diversity as a necessary evil imposed by the state and/or accrediting agency (Ladson-Billings, 1999). Governed by NCATE and the TAC, the teacher preparation program examined in this study is familiar with policies that expect multicultural education to be a focus for developing prospective teachers. The hope is that not just the teacher preparation program examined in this study, but all teacher preparation programs, will view multicultural education as a commitment rather than simply a mandated requirement as they stray away from generic models of teaching and teacher education.

Since Texas has been experiencing changing demographics with significant growth in minority and poor student populations, a policy that designates competency in

multicultural education as a requirement for teacher certification is warranted and needed. Although the Texas Administrative Code provides broad goals for multicultural education, teacher preparation programs must provide cohesiveness among specific objectives that govern multicultural education. As a recommendation for the development of a multicultural education policy for teacher preparation programs in Texas, policymakers should conduct an assessment of Texas' specific needs regarding cultural diversity in school districts to develop curriculum objectives and implementation strategies in collaboration with practitioners and those affiliated with teacher preparation programs through teaching or coordination.

The local school district that was examined in this study does not have specific policy objectives for multicultural education in schools. However, it does have a policy that addressed civic engagement in which the objective is that all students will value democracy and be productive members of the community. The next step should be to implement ongoing professional development for teachers that involves Ladson-Billings' three criteria of culturally relevant pedagogy. Policymakers in Texas should consider the necessity of state funding for implementation, leadership support and training, and vertical communication among all constituencies.

Areas for Further Research

Further research is needed to investigate the relationship between multicultural education and student achievement. In the area of teacher preparation, further research could consist of examining models of multicultural education used on college and

university campuses. One concern in examining state multicultural education policies is the broad nature of the concepts. A teacher preparation policy that addresses multicultural education should entail specific objectives that are implemented in all state teacher preparation programs.

The Texas Administrative Code has broad goals for multicultural education in the curriculum standards; however, the policy does not address multicultural education as a competency in teacher certification. According to this policy, the examinations that prospective teachers must pass in order to be certified do not address any components of multicultural education. Because Texas currently has no multicultural education policy for teacher certification, further research could consist of a study that compares the political culture of Texas to the political culture of states with similar demographics that have multicultural education policies that govern teacher certification.

Conclusion

This research was an interpretive qualitative study (Merriam, 2002) of 10 elementary school teachers nominated by their principals as being effective with African American students in a large urban school district. The primary focus of this study was to analyze the perceptions of effective teachers of African American students. The following research questions were investigated and addressed in this study:

1. What are teachers' perceptions of their effectiveness with African American students in a large urban school district?

2. What are the teachers' perceptions of the preservice preparation that assisted them in their effectiveness with African American students?

3. What other components do the teachers identify that contributed to their effectiveness with African American students?

4. To what extent are the teachers' beliefs about teaching consistent with the components of culturally relevant pedagogy?

Chapter 1 provided an overview of the study with a focus on preparing teachers to assist culturally diverse students in attaining successful outcomes. Chapter 2 provided a review of the literature on teacher preparation and multicultural education, examined the research regarding culturally relevant pedagogy, and discussed the implications for African American students as well as other minority and poor students. In addition, Chapter 2 discussed policy issues for teacher preparation programs with a significant focus on the state of Texas. Chapter 3 provided an explanation for the primary focus of the research along with a description of the methodology and the rationale for selecting to use qualitative research. Chapter 4 presented only the results of the study. Chapter 5 presented an analysis of the emergent themes, interpretations of the findings, limitations of the research, recommendations, and areas of further research.

The hope is that the data presented in this study will initiate trends that assist in effectively preparing teachers to attain successful outcomes with African American students. Prospective and practicing teachers in various studies on multicultural education have disclosed their concerns about not being prepared to instruct culturally diverse students. Multicultural education is comprised of initiatives that are currently being debated in teacher preparation involving equity, diversity, and student

achievement. Teacher education programs must make multicultural education and culturally relevant pedagogy an important component when preparing teachers for the classroom as they face the growing population of students who are rich in cultural diversity. Since Texas has been experiencing changing demographics with significant growth in minority and poor student populations, competence within the area of multicultural education is warranted and needed in teacher certification.

In addition to teachers' perceptions regarding their effectiveness with African American students, this interpretive qualitative study employed the used of document analysis and interviews with selected university faculty to examine the multicultural education training component that targets African American students in the undergraduate teacher preparation program at a highly selective public university in Texas. The data were collected through interviews and document analysis. The themes that emerged from data collected with the 10 elementary school teachers included (a) perceptions of culture, (b) beliefs about teaching, (c) academic accountability, (d) teacher preparation, and (e) contributions to success.

This study utilized Ladson-Billings' (1995a, 2001) culturally relevant pedagogy as a theoretical framework to examine teachers' perspectives. In addition, this study conducted a document analysis of teacher preparation programs and policies related to this study, supplemented with interviews of selected university faculty. Although this study used basic interpretive qualitative research (Merriam, 2001) to make sense of the teachers' perceptions and the naturalistic inquiry paradigm (Guba & Lincoln, 1985) to guide the research questions, Ladson-Billings' (1995a, 2001) theoretical framework of

culturally relevant pedagogy required a critical element, not typically associated with a constructionist approach. Data indicate that the achievement gap persists with many poor students of color when compared to their white peers (TEA, 2006). Even though data reveal that a disproportionate match exists between the percentages of students of color and the percentages of teachers of color, teachers of several racial backgrounds participated in this study and had the ability to develop African American students academically.

According to the findings in this study, some principals consider teachers to be effective based upon their ability to develop students academically, not because of their willingness to nurture and support cultural competence or their ability to foster the development of a sociopolitical or critical consciousness. Thus, in the context of high stakes testing, it can be concluded that effectiveness is measured by a teacher's ability to develop students academically. Although several teachers did not meet all of the indicators within the three criteria of Ladson-Billings' (1995a, 2001) theoretical framework of culturally relevant pedagogy, this theory is still an important one as prospective teachers prepare for classrooms with culturally diverse students. While teachers are being considered effective based on their students' scores on standardized tests, this effect of high stakes testing could contribute to the future detriment of students as they negotiate their cultural identities and challenges with the status quo. Since the ability to develop students academically was the most predominant criterion of culturally relevant pedagogy that the teachers possessed, the findings in this study indicate that their practices with academic achievement could be useful for all students, not just

African American students. Similarly, the recommendations for educational practice, teacher preparation, and educational policy are applicable in facilitating successful outcomes for all students.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: LETTER TO PRINCIPALS

Kenya Haynes
3101 Etheredge Drive
Austin, TX 78725
[cell phone number]

Dear [name of school district] Principals:

I am currently in the process of conducting research to fulfill the dissertation requirement for Ph.D. in Educational Administration at the University of Texas at Austin. The purpose of my study is to analyze the perceptions that successful teachers of African American students have regarding the factors that contribute to their success. Examining the perceptions of teachers successful with African American students may be beneficial to educators, teacher preparation programs, and educational policy as we strive to close the achievement gap.

This study has been approved by [name of school district]. In order to conduct this study, I request your assistance in identifying teachers who fit certain criteria.

These teachers must exhibit the following:

- be either male or female;
- represent any ethnicity or race;
- currently teach students in grades K–5;
- be a graduate of the undergraduate elementary teacher preparation program at the [name of university];
- teach a majority of African American students;
- have at least 3 years of teaching experience; and
- be identified as highly successful in teaching African American students.

I would also ask that I be able to schedule interviews with you to discuss the criteria and what you believe makes the nominated teacher highly successful with African American students. I will follow district and campus protocol and only speak to teachers who agree to participate. These interviews will only be scheduled with your approval.

If you have any questions or concerns about the nomination procedures and interviews, please call me at [phone number] or my dissertation supervisor, Dr. Gregory Vincent at [phone number].

Please fill out the nomination form and mail it to me in the postage-paid envelope. There is no limit to the number of teachers you can nominate.

Thank you in advance for your participation in this study.

Sincerely,
Kenya L. Haynes

APPENDIX B: TEACHER NOMINATION FORM

Teacher Nomination Form

Teacher's Name_____

Teacher's Current School_____

Did the teacher complete the teacher preparation program at [name of university]? _____

Current teaching assignment for this teacher:

Grade_____

Number of years teaching_____

Number of years you have worked with this teacher_____

Please explain why you view this teacher as highly successful in teaching African American students.

Please describe how you came to believe this teacher is highly successful in teaching African American students.

APPENDIX C: TEACHER QUESTIONNAIRE

Teacher Questionnaire

Teacher's Name_____

Teacher's Current School_____

Did you complete the teacher preparation program at [name of university]?

_____

What is your current teaching assignment?

Grade_____

How many years have you been teaching? _____

How many years have you worked at this school? _____

Why do you believe that you are successful in teaching African American students?

APPENDIX D: INTERVIEW PROTOCOLS

Interview Protocol for Elementary Principals

Do I have permission to tape the interview?

Demographic Data

- How long have you been in education?
- How long have you been a principal?
- How long have you been the principal at this school?
- What are the student demographics of your school?
- What is the socioeconomic status of your students?
- Does the teacher you nominated meet the selection criteria?

Rationale for Nominating a Teacher

1. Why do you believe that the teacher you nominated is effective with African American students?

2. Tell me about any teaching strategies that this teacher uses in order to be effective with African American students?

3. What are the results of TAKS data for this teacher?

4. What are the results of other assessment data?

5. How does the teacher handle discipline concerns with African American students?

6. How does the teacher work with the parents of African American students?

7. What is the role of the school in the students' achievement in this classroom?

8. What other information would you like to share about the teacher and his or her effectiveness with African American students?

Interview Protocol for Elementary Teachers

Do I have permission to tape the interviews?

Demographic Data

- How long have you been teaching?
- How long have the majority of your students been African American?
- What are your certification areas?
- What degrees have you obtained?
- Where did you attend an undergraduate teacher preparation program?
- When did you attend an undergraduate teacher preparation program?
- What are the student demographics of your class/school?
- What is the socioeconomic status of your students?

Background Experiences

1. Tell me about your own cultural background.

2. Give me some examples of cultural differences.

3. Can you describe cultural differences between yourself and your students?

Beliefs about Teaching

1. What is your teaching philosophy?

2. What does the word "culture" mean to you?

3. Give me a profile of an African American student who is doing particularly well in your class without disclosing any information that would identify this student.

4. What do you believe are the greatest academic and personal needs of your students?

5. What do you believe are the three most important things you can teach your students?

6. How do you understand the problem of African American students' underachievement?

7. Think about the educational experiences of African American students in U.S. public schools. Do you see any differences in white students' educational experiences?

8. Why do you believe you are successful teaching African American students?

9. What are some teaching strategies that you have found to be successful with African American students?

10. How do you make sure the needs of your students are met?

11. In your experience how does culture affect the teaching and learning process?

12. What kind of support do the students get from home?

13. How important are the daily interpersonal interactions you have with your students? Can you think of an example?

14. What are the positive and difficult interactions that you have had with your students' parents?

15. What do you see as the role of the school in the students' achievement?

16. How do you assess your students beyond TAKS?

17. What are your beliefs about excellence?

18. Do you have any similarities with your students? If so, what are they? Do you point the similarities out to your students?

Teacher Preparation

1. Tell me about the courses that prepared you to be successful with African American students.

2. How were you exposed to diverse student populations in your coursework?

3. How was multicultural education implemented in your teacher preparation program?

4. What knowledge did you acquire about effective teaching strategies?

5. Tell me about the field experiences that prepared you to be successful with African American students.

6. How long was your student teaching experience?

7. What were the demographics/socioeconomic status of the students in your student teaching experience?

8. What experiences in your student teaching experience prepared you to work with African American students?

9. What were three of the most important effective components of your teacher preparation program?

10. Is there anything that would have been more helpful in preparing you to be successful with African American students?

11. Since you have been teaching, what has helped you to become more successful with African American students?

With a constructionist approach, the questions in this interview protocol will be used in an interpretive qualitative study to investigate the perceptions of effective teachers of African American students. Portions of this interview protocol were adapted from *Successful, White, Female Teachers of Mexican American Students* (2005), a dissertation by Rebecca Elaine Garza.

Interview Protocol for University Faculty Members

Do I have permission to tape the interview?

Demographic Data

- How long have you been a faculty member at this university?
- How are you involved with the teacher preparation program at this university?
- What courses do you teach?

Teacher Preparation Program

Courses/Selection

1. How are students selected for the elementary teacher preparation program?
2. How has the teacher preparation program evolved at this university?
3. How has the emphasis on multicultural education evolved at this university?
4. Tell me about the courses that prepare teachers for elementary classrooms?
5. What courses are required before students are admitted to the teacher preparation program?
6. How are students exposed to diverse student populations in their coursework?
7. How is multicultural education implemented in the teacher preparation program?
8. What knowledge do teachers acquire about effective teaching strategies?
9. What knowledge do teachers acquire about effective teaching strategies with African American students?

Field Experiences

1. What kinds of practicums occur prior to the student teaching assignment?
2. Tell me about the field experiences that prepare teachers to be effective with African American students.
3. How long is the student teaching assignment?

4. What are the typical demographics/socioeconomic status of the schools in the student teaching experience?

5. What do you believe are three of the most important components of the teacher preparation program?

6. Is there anything that might be more helpful in preparing teachers to be effective with African American students?

7. What kind of follow-up occurs after the teachers leave the program?

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